



ISSN 2319-7684

MIDDLE FLIGHT

SSM JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE
UGC Approved National Level Peer Reviewed Journal

*SPECIAL VOLUME ON
Gender and Sexuality Studies*

NOVEMBER 2018

VOL. 7

NO. 1

Middle Flight

We deeply mourn the demise of our advisory board member and mentor from the beginning, Dr Parvati Charan Chakraborty, Profesor of English, Burdwan University and formerly Associate Professor of R. K. M. Residential College (Autonomous), Narendrapur, Kolkata, W. B., India.

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SSM JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

UGC Approved National Level Peer Reviewed Journal

VOL. 7 November 2018 No. 1



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

S.S. MAHAVIDYALAYA

KESHPUR, PASCHIM MEDINIPUR

PIN: 721150, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

UGC Approved National Level Peer Reviewed Journal

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Published: November, 2018

ISSN: 2319 – 7684

Published by : **Sukumar Sengupta Mahavidyalaya**

Keshpur, Paschim Medinipur, Pin: 721150

Ph: 03227-250861, Mail: middleflight@gmail.com

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Rs. 500.00 (INR)

Message from the Guest Editor

Gender studies and sexuality studies are not synonymous but are significantly inter-linked. Such linkages and convergences in critical discourse addressing representations of gender and sexuality in literary writing problematize traditional responses to literary interpretation and close reading. This transformative approach is a paradigm shift. It is also more holistic as such readings address issues of cultural politics and identity politics, primarily exploring the intersections of race, class, location, gender, sexuality, education and religion. A holistic reading of a literary text therefore implies that a literary text adheres to the parameters defined by standpoint theory and cultural studies, that foreground complexities and conflicts within cultures and races and regards economic class factors and cognitive responses as defining normative or counter-normative practices. Sexuality studies has been a rather belated entrant into Indian academic discourse and representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities have hitherto been systematically marginalized as these were categorized as the Other in gender studies.

In this 7th volume of *Middle Flight* literary representations of gender and sexuality have been critically read and re-read opening up vestiges of interpretation that have been neglected, overlooked or unfairly underrepresented. The essays in this volume trigger fresh epistemic engagements and intellectual debate, as they span the diverse cultural zones of world literature. The essays therefore represent a very wide trajectory, from Indian classical literature to *Jugantar*, the Indian vernacular newspaper of the colonial times, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In fact *Purple Hibiscus* was Adichie's debut novel that was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2004, when I was the Chairperson of the jury panel of the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Interestingly also, some essays focus on cultural texts such as *jatras*, the *queer* films of Rituparna Ghosh, representations of courtezans and musicians in Bollywood films, while some essays examine the gendered texts of Tagore, Anita Nair, Ismat Chughtai and Bapsi Sidhwa. As guest editor of the 7th Volume of *Middle Flight* I feel deeply honoured and humbled to have been entrusted with the task of reading and re-reviewing the scholarly essays included herein. It has been a rich learning experience for me and I am very pleased to express my sincere gratitude to the editors of *Middle Flight*, Debdas Roy and Pritha Kundu for the opportunity.

Dr Sanjukta Dasgupta

Former Professor, Dept of English, Calcutta University

Editorial

Gender is no longer a question of essentialism, nor of merely being and becoming a woman, a 'queer' person or a hermaphrodite. Any emancipation movement must not lose sight of the Promised Land – which is, in this case, to 'influence' the everyday conducts, attitudes and the zeitgeist irrespective of culture and academic discipline. Despite signs of changes across the globe, Gender studies caravan is still to go miles. In India conferences and workshops are organised to deliberate and explore alternatives for improving public infrastructure systems to reduce the opportunity aspect of crimes against women. The role of the civil society, and particularly the media, becomes vital in ensuring due process works while encouraging greater public awareness in protecting the agency of women's freedom.

On the whole, gender is not only a problem with women, but a big question of identity for the humankind at large. Even today a genuine victim of sexual abuse is dubbed as a woman of 'loose character' and "women are exhorted to be women, remain women and become women" (Beauvoir). A victim of domestic violence is required to compromise for the integrity of the family. Rape, molestation, selective infanticide, female genital mutilation — these are only some parts of the ugly face of the traumatised gender-experience we have to 'live with' in our society. The Third Gender people suffer all kinds of social persecution, humiliation, stigma and 'othering'. People with so-called 'different' gender-orientations are either victimised, or pitied by the so-called normative majority. Ours is a time to think, to feel and to look for ways that may hope to bring changes to the present polemics of the terrible question of 'Gender'. The seventh volume of *Middle Flight* purports to join the discussion on such a 'glocal' issue of utmost importance.

We are fortunate to receive a number of scholarly papers, dealing with issues related to gender, varied in scope and possibilities. Considering the wide range of topics and interests handled by our illustrious contributors, the present issue of *Middle Flight* has been divided into several sections. The first section contains papers dealing with the issue of 'Resistance and Interface'. In this section we have included papers that deal with women's suffering and resistance in one form or another: sometimes texts like *Surfacing* or *Mama Day* become sites of resistance; and sometimes, of interface between gender and some greater social concern. Abhishek Ghosal's paper, interrogating the interface between gender and crime has added much to the critical and explorative potential of this section. Bikash Chandra Mondol successfully retrieves the discourse of *Jugantar Patrika*, regarding the women's question in colonial India. The issue of Gender inequality and the victimization of women in the Indian social

scenario is upheld by Sumana Mukherjee, with reference to Anees Jung's *Unveiling India* and *Seven Sisters*.

The second section, titled 'Retrieving, Re-reading and Restructuring' includes papers with varied scopes and areas of critical engagement. Dr Ayushman Chakraborty's paper on the absence of the female Thugs in the Thug-narratives of the colonial period unveils a forgotten, darkened track in the history of British Bengal. Dipak Giri's paper, in its thoughtful re-reading of the early feminist Bengali author Kavita Singha, deserves special mention. Basundhara Chakraborty's paper on Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* and Jyotsna's paper on Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* offers a re-reading of the said texts from a feminist perspective. In Paramita Bandyopadhyay's paper, one may find some attempts to re-read an oft-discussed playtext like *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

'Moving Forward' is the thematic concern of the third section. Papers belonging to this section deal with the forward-looking movement initiated by women's writing in various fields – periodical letters, reflective essays, and modern Indian drama. Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty's insightful observations on the reflective prose-writings of nineteenth century women bring out the question of 'marriage as a bondage'. Equally interesting is the paper by Nibedita Paul, dealing with the refashioning of the female self in the 19th century periodical essays by educated women. The other contribution in this section, by V. Satya Sudha, celebrates the achievement of Bharati Sarabhai – one of the leading women dramatists in India.

Section 4 is concerned with 'Body, Sexuality and Queer Studies'. We are grateful to Dr Samata Biswas for her scholarly contribution on such a sensitive issue as sexual initiation and sense of violation which, in our society, comes to so many young women as an experience after marriage. Her clinical perspective, merged with an ethico-political take on the matter extends the scope of the paper to a broader area of social awareness. Irona Bhaduri's paper successfully delves into the 'Queer' tales of the epic or legendary figures of the 'Other' kinds of sexuality – Sikhandi and many like him/her. The tension between power and sexual identity as depicted in Tagore's *Chitrangada* finds expression through Sanghita Sanyal's critical analysis. Other papers by Koyel Chanda and Chanchal de Boxi also offer considerably well-thought observation on the problems of exclusion based on bodily and gendered identities. Soumya Sundar Mukherjee's article critically engages with the issue of female sexuality in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

'Gender and Marginality' is the theme of Section 5. It gives us glimpses of relatively lesser-known or almost unknown texts – for instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, P.Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and women slave-narratives like *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear* and *Memoir of Old Elizabeth*. Tuhin

Mukhopadhyay deals with gender both from the perspectives of ‘immolated women’ and ‘mutilated men’ – both being part of the ‘margin’.

The most interesting section, perhaps, is the one that handles gender in relation to various art-forms. Dr Niladri Roy’s paper is based on the experience of exploitation which is common to a large number of women singers in professional music. Jayati Ganguly’s paper reads the figure of ‘Tawaif’ as a gendered and cultural trope in some major Bollywood movies like *Pakeezah*, *Umrao Jaan* and *Devdas*. Smriti Chowdhuri’s paper discusses how some Jatra-texts in the twentieth century seek to re-imagine some mythical figures. The Queer trilogy of Rituparno Ghosh becomes central to the paper contributed by Koushik Mondol; and interrogation of patriarchy as depicted in two other films by Ghosh, is discussed by Trisita Ganguly.

The shortest but a rich, critically engaging section titled ‘Looking beyond’ includes three papers. The brilliant paper by Prof. Prodosh Bhattacharya unearths the issue of rejuvenation from a gendered perspective, drawing our attention to the enchanting area of English and Bengali popular fiction, the latter being part of an ‘anxiety of influence’ of the former. Dr Jolly Das has thrown a new light on the character of Sarvilaka in the ancient Sanskrit *prakarana* called *Mricchakatika* (*The Little Clay Cart*) – trying to explore how gender (here masculinity) and marginality can merge together through a wretched man’s struggle to find a major role back in the playtext, and in society – the high site of life-drama. Neha Chatterjee’s paper questions ‘New Womanhood’ with a close reading of Anita Nair’s novel, *Ladies Coupe*: here feminism interrogates its own assumptions and seeks to look beyond.

The active and consistent help and co-operation from the honourable members of our advisory board and our reviewers have enabled us to proceed with this voluminous issue. All contributors deserve our sincere thanks for being with us, and we hope that they will continue to do so in future. Dr D. K. Bhunia, the honourable Principal of S.S. Mahavidyalaya has been a great support behind our academic venture; no thanks are enough to pay him his due. We feel privileged that a connoisseur in the field we have chosen to focus on, Dr Sanjukta Dasgupta, Visiting Professor, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland, Convenor, English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, President, Executive Committee, Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library at ICCR, Kolkata and former Professor, Dept of English, Calcutta University kindly agreed to be the Guest Editor for this special volume. Finally, we extend our thanks to our colleagues teaching in S. S. Mahavidyalaya and in some other institutions of India as well.

Debdas Roy
Pritha Kundu
(Editors)

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Culture as Site of Resistance in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*

C. G. Shyamala

“How do you keep your soul and still succeed in America? For the Afro-Americans, regardless of where you climb on the ladder of success there will be racism. Under these conditions, if you give up what centers(culture) you, what is unique in you-then you are lost...there is a pressure to amalgamate. And this is suicidal when it happens to Afro-Americans” (qtd. in Watkins 12).

The above-mentioned lines posit the need to preserve native African culture as the repercussion of imperialism or mass exodus of diverse groups in Africa due to the search of better prospects in the advent of globalisation among other factors. The most significant aspect of such movements of people of diverse cultures would inevitably be power struggle that would result in the dominance or suppression of cultures. Concomitantly, race, class and gender differences would contribute to resistance against dominance. Helen Tiffin opines: “Post-colonial literatures/cultures are thus constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices, and they offer Ôfields’ or counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse” (96). The counter-discursive nature constitutes post-colonial literatures rather than a unifying style or theme. Counter-discourse fails to recognize that by existing simply to react against or to resist dominant ideology, it is marginalized into an idea that does not have an independent existence.

Tiffin further states that counter-discourse exists “in its determining relations with its material situation” (96). Cultural resistance includes meanings and symbols, which are inextricable parts of culture, used to contest and combat a dominant power thereby constructing a different vision of the world in the process. Traditions bear artifacts that are unique to any culture. This paper concentrates on Naylor’s denouncement of a foreign culture to which the Afro-Americans are forced to adhere and insists on preservation and transmission of African culture through artifacts that resist dominant culture.

Foucault claims that resistance is inevitable within power structures, which obviously suggest that resistance contributes to the formation of power structures. In the postmodern scenario, importance is given to traditions because they remind the

individual of a culture that they should not be surrendering before the dominant one. Such an attitude instills a sense of pride and the discovery of lost roots to several generations of African Americans. African culture is often suppressed by many African Americans who, in the need to survive forsake their native languages and culture. The inner conflict faced by many of the African Americans is due to the pressure to succumb to a foreign culture. Naylor's novel is a survival strategy by which the black Americans recognize themselves to be an organized ethnic group that is conscious of its rich cultural heritage and has celebrated its quest for personal and social freedom.

The construction of an island community of women that preserves the cultural memory through the repetition of material practices that include weaving, cooking, stitching and through the rendition of personal and communal stories is one of the ways by which the ethnic community strives to attain personal and social liberty. The African American identity rests on communal identity that serves the vital link between two cultures, one losing its nativity and the other not yet assimilated within the consciousness of the individual. Her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* contains infusions of cultural practices. For instance, she creates seven women characters where Mattie acts Miranda. Mattie has learned to heal and care through her 'collective consciousness' that prompts her to nurse Ciel back to life. Mattie's role in the novel is to transmit the cultural values in a fragmented Brewster society.

Naylor desires to share the history and past of the African Americans because most of the African Americans are uninformed and misinformed about their ancestors and ancestral roots in Africa. Through depictions that raise black consciousness, she intends to defend the rich black culture, which is distorted by the whites who promulgate white manners, religion and practices and relegate the indigenous practices. As Miranda laments about an attendant at Dr Smithfield's clinic: "That's what happens when you send 'em off to fancy schools and they settle beyond the bridge-they start forgetting how to talk to folks" (*Mama* 77).

Naylor has attempted to sound authentic to her portrayal of African customs by bringing the inhabitants of the island closer to Africa than mainland America. This island deserves special mention as it is an enclave of positive Black identity and African heritage. A range of cultural practices bring the remnants of a culture together. For instance, quilt making is central to African American culture because it threads together the disintegrated black families separated by forced migration and slavery. The metaphor of the quilt epitomizes the creative legacy that African Americans have inherited from their maternal ancestors. In the quilts, fragments are woven together into a flawless whole where, "you can't tell where one ring ends and the other begins" (*Mama* 137). The quilts are a constant reminder of the African ancestors, whose thoughts create a sense of pride in the Africans. Mama Day is reminded of the ancestors one night as she works with the old clothes from her scarp bag one night. She decides

to take the memories of the past to the future.

Quilt motif has also been employed in the novel to show the difference in cultural understanding of the folks from Willow Springs and Mainland America. This is evident when the wedding quilt of George and Cocoa arrives the first summer. George, who is from mainland America wants to “clear a wall in the living room and hang it up,” while Cocoa that the quilt has been made to be used not just for her and George, but for their “grandchildren to be conceived under this quilt” (*Mama* 147). The folks in the mainland are unable to see the cultural and spiritual aspect of the tradition of the quilt. Alice Walker narrates a similar incident in her short story “Everyday Use”. Wangro and Maggie, sisters are different in their outlook on life.

Wangro, ashamed at the abject poverty of the family, leaves home in search of prospects, while Maggie remains at home. Wangro returns to claim her grandmother’s quilts so that she might display her heritage to her sophisticated friends. Maggie agrees to lend them and Wangro says: “Maggie cannot appreciate these quilts...she’d be backward enough to put them to everyday use” (*Mama* 53). Wangro is right because Maggie would use the quilts and she would continue the tradition with her own quilting when her grandmother’s are worn out but Wangro is responsible for disseminating the heritage to the future generations. Walker and Naylor reiterate that somebody who is outside the culture may take any cultural artifact as a primitive model and may try to explain it. It is the native of a culture who contributes to the development of that culture.

George has been presented as a culturally astray person because he has been brought up in an orphanage that instilled in him the basic lessons of American values, culture and ideas on capitalism. His egoism is the result of an upbringing that has left him bereft of an understanding of native culture and values. His is rootless as far as his culture is concerned because he stays in between two cultures- his native culture and the adopted one. He notices the contrast between his life and Cocoa’s and comments: “I was always in awe of the stories you told so easily about Willow Springs. To be born in a grandmother’s house, to be able to walk and see where a great-grandmother and even great-great-grandmother was born. You had more than a family, you had a history. And I didn’t even have a real last name” (*Mama* 62). George is culturally ostracized since he is the victim of the slave trade and its cruel consequences. He has been brought up under circumstances where the history of a whole nation has been manipulated by colonialism.

Naylor’s Miranda is gifted with powers that are in tandem with the life force on Willow Springs. She lives with nature, helping all living things to resonate with life as it exists. She knows the medicinal and other properties of roots, having trained her sensitivities for almost a century. She can perceive extraordinary things in the familiar

landscape, "...the whole island was her playground; she'd walked through a dry winter without snapping a single twig, disappear into the shadow of a summer cottonwood, flatten herself so close to the ground under a moss-covered rock self, folks started believing John-Paul's little girl became a spirit in the wood" (*Mama* 79). She demystifies her powers intentionally, which is in contrast to a conjurer caught up in the trappings of mysterious dealings with dark powers and emphasizes that spiritual power is located in such activities. The author comments: "Miranda is the wise woman of the community and she possesses formidable powers used in helping and healing the inhabitants of Willow Springs. Her power lies not just in herbal remedies or conjured spells; they emanate from deep recesses of the mind and perhaps more ancient sources of power" (*Mama* 130).

The history of Willow Springs is deeply intertwined with the history of her family that she can perceive the extraordinary power of the place. She does not practice magic. Her ability to cure comes from the intuitive psychology aided by simple signs like pumpkin seeds that she gives Bernice to help her conceive. Miranda specifies certain waiting period followed by a visit to "the other place." She also says: "The only miracle is life itself. And when it comes, it comes" (*Mama* 43). Miranda prescribes the waiting period to let Bernice's body heal from a bout of self-prescribed fertility pills, "...she turns Bernice on her back and makes her fold her hands gently on her belly, close your eyes and try to concentrate on the pain" (73). Her knowledge of primitive medicines and her deep involvement with nature is a source of strength to the people around her. Mama Day emphasizes that locations and practices have spiritual power which influences the powers granted to individuals.

Mama Day treats individuals with medicines procured from nature. She uses a special paste to Cocoa's head after cutting off hair from her scalp. Similarly, the symbolic egg is a trope for Miranda's way of life. It applies her commitment to Willow Springs, her love of nature and her works as midwife, helping women conceive. When she goes to pick eggs, "...her fingers curl gently around a warm egg that shows a deepening spot with tiny veins running out from it" (*Mama* 41). Mama Day prefers healing and natural herbs rather than allopathic medicines. When Cocoa falls prey to the jealousy of a neighbouring woman and consequently falls seriously ill, George becomes concerned to find suitable treatment for the ailment. He is reluctant to seek Mama Day's help but when the only bridge that connects Willow Springs to the mainland is destroyed by the hurricane, he feels helpless. Finally, he goes to Mama Day, who persuades him to place his belief not in modern medicines but in the unfathomable healing power of love with which she succeeds in restoring Ophelia back to life from the verge of death.

Reema's son, who is a native but an outsider by virtue of his preference for Western patterns of rationality provides an insight into the cultural differences and

preferences of the African-Americans in the mainland. They have scant respect for old traditions and mock at the traditional notions of culture and the ways of expressing an old culture. He returns to Willow Springs as ethnographer after spending a long time abroad. His intention is to record and preserve the island's folk tradition and symbolizes a failed model for modern African Americans who bridge the gap between mainland and folk societies.

Though he offers an account of Willow springs that celebrates resistance to colonialism, he instigates a colonial ideology that fails to open his own appropriation of Willow Springs as a paradigm for "inventing hostile social and political parameters" (Blyn 256). His education and training in the Western academy has distanced him geographically, linguistically and culturally from Willow Springs. Reema's son undermines the voice of Willow Springs and interprets life there from his own perspective, which he has gained from his training abroad. He is regarded as "a classic example of an educated fool" (Wall 12). He turns out to be another figure representing Eurocentrism, assimilation and cultural imperialism.

For Reema's son, Willow Springs is a model for a diasporic community that successfully retains its cultural identity through an active engagement with the terms of colonization imposed upon it. Despite his efforts to "put Willow Springs on the map" and to celebrate its culture of heroic resistance to Western imperialism, the community of Willow Springs scorns both Reema's son and his propositions" (*Mama* 7). Naylor makes it clear as she associates Reema's son with the real estate developers who scheme in vain to turn Willow Springs into a "vacation paradise" (*Mama* 4) where "the only dark faces you see... is the ones cleaning the toilets and cutting grass" (6). *Mama Day* feels that anything "from beyond the bridge" has to be "viewed real, real careful" because the pseudo knowledge possessed by even her own people is dangerous for the culture and history of Willow Springs. This is true in the case of Reema's boy who reverses the location of Willow Springs on the map. According to him: "...18 & 23 wasn't 18 & 23 at all - was really 81 & 32, which just so happened to be the lines of longitude and latitude marking off where Willow Springs sits on the map" (7).

Racial prejudice prevented the full participation of blacks in the dominant culture so that their need for symbols and values had to be filled by the ethnic subculture. This process encouraged the retention and reinterpretation of African practices such as voodoo, conjuring, dance, work song, folktales and community gatherings that would enable them to cope with the demands of their new life and to express the will of the group to survive. Culture produces assorted perceptions, illusions and distortions, which shapes the lives of the characters in the novel to a great extent. *Mama Day* exemplifies a tradition where strong black women at the centre preserve their culture. The counterculture practiced by Naylor overtly rejects conventional wisdom and standards of behaviour of the dominant culture and provides alternatives to mainstream culture.

Naylor is apprehensive of the fact that the need to propagate indigenous cultures is crucial because the progressive generations find themselves caught in the matrix of diverse customs and traditions that tend to shirk them away from their native roots. Faithfulness to one's roots instills the courage to follow and practice religion without deliberation, fear of being criticised or ridiculed. Naylor asks her community to have faith in indigenous customs, traditions and rituals as they are a means of preserving and propagating native identity. In this era of globalization, when civilization is heading towards a single culture, it is difficult to retain and persist with marginal cultures. Naylor attempts to prescribe some strategies to protect and retain resident culture, which is exemplary in her insistence on practices which are unique to one's culture. The power of nature, the spirit of the place and the importance of history are forces to reckon with. Colonial culture possesses the habit of annihilating native culture to promote a way of life that is familiar to the colonias, which could be interpreted as a control mechanism as well as survival strategy. Naylor, however, remains adamant in advocating a strong sense of native culture and its relevance in the times to come.

With changes in social, political and economic conditions, cultures seem to undergo modifications and the ramifications are succinct in contemporary works of literature. These changes assert that the customs that find their representation in cultures that face disappearance due to the proliferation of newer cultures and forms of expressions are subject to newer modes of interference. Naylor does not advocate conflict but the confluence of these cultures to accommodate the modifications inherent in them. Neither going against any particular culture nor advocating complete adherence to any one culture, Naylor seems to suggest that every culture is unique, could be assimilationist or not, but it takes a strong sense of togetherness and oneness in proclaiming a culture as one's own when it has been transmitted over the years and becomes a sign of a distinct culture that needs to be sustained. Generations should stand united in ensuring that the culture that has been within the family should be respected, followed and practiced by the succeeding generations in the hope of reviving and instilling the value of native customs.

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Voice against Patriarchy: A Feminist Study of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

V. Amutha

Patriarchy is a social system in which society is organized around male authority figures. Most forms of feminism characterize patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women and is dependent on female subordination. Simon de Beauvoir points out "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being". (16) Thus women are caught somewhere in-between freedom and subjection. Neeru Tandon in 'Margaret Atwood: A Jewel in Canadian Writing' opines, "the word patriarchy implies the domination by man as a ruling power in the family". (170)

Atwood's *Surfacing* traces a woman's ardent quest for her own self. The protagonist (the "I" in the novel) is a nameless young woman who travels to the lonely northern Quebec where she had once lived as a child. The motif of the journey is to search for her missing father. She revolts against women's 'accepted' aspirations as well as against 'accepted' notions of motherhood. She questions and challenges the traditional place of a woman in society. The identities the protagonist drifts into – e.g. that of a victim, a colonized, powerless subject etc. - make her ponder over her past and also over how a woman becomes an 'other' in the society. Simon de Beauvoir's comments would be pertinent here, "A free and autonomous being like all creatures - (a woman) finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other". (Preface)

The protagonist of the novel has fallen in love with one of her teachers. She was made to believe him, but later on she was exploited by the man she loved. He insisted on her aborting the child. She could not face her parents after this disastrous incident and hence she decided not to return. She informed them through the postcard regarding her wedding, about the child in the womb and how she lost her child to the husband whom she divorced. She reflects upon her separation from her husband thus "a divorce is like an amputation, you survive, but there are less of you" (36). Her separation from her child is described thus - "a section of my own life sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh cancelled...". She feels dejected that she has been deprived of the joys and thrills of motherhood. She calls it a murder and feels that she is responsible for it, "I could have said no but I did not; that made me... a killer" (165). She could not dare to challenge the symbolic power of the patriarch. Juliet Mitchell in

Psychoanalysis and Feminism uses the term 'patriarchy' to refer to the symbolic power which fathers have within these systems, and the consequences of this power for the "inferiorized . . . psychology of women". (402)

Woman's physicality and mentality is unconsciously shaped by patriarchal culture. Anna is the best friend of the protagonist, though she knows her for only two months. Anna is a failed wife and is always compelled to present an artificially pleasant face in full make-up. She says "If I forgot my makeup he will kill me". (140) A woman has to wear the mask of artificiality in married life. Anna is not satisfied with her marriage; she is a pathetic woman dependent upon a sadistic husband. Her marriage is notable for its worst qualities - male sadism, female victimization, mutual deceit, treachery and so on. Though Anna repeatedly mouths anti-male sentiments, she slaps layers of make up on her face for David's benefit and invariably sides with the men during moments of tension. This shows her insecurity and emotional weakness in her marriage. Anna is married but David does not want to get her pregnant. She takes pills to avoid pregnancy and David compels her to swallow these pills so that he can enjoy sex without 'risk'. One feels like recalling these words of Beauvoir "The male world is harsh, sharp edged, its voices are too resounding, the lights too crude, the contacts rough" (557). Anna is sometimes a willing victim and is often victimized by David.

Woman has traditionally been seen as a secondary part of the family, the society and so on. She is seldom a personality in her own right. In all societies, man has been given greater honour, and he has been considered the head of the family, and things have been planned to suit his ways. This has been the practice for so long that women till recent times tend to accept this dispensation most sincerely. In Atwood's *Surfacing* Anna typifies women who are subjugated and subjected to miseries in the male dominated world. David is a fake husband; he appears as if he is committed to the welfare of woman. David, the representative of the patriarchal power, is possessive and oppressive. He represents what Beauvoir terms as "masculine code" which thrives on abortion, adultery, wrongdoing, betrayals and lies". (Beauvoir 557)

The protagonist is betrayed by a selfish lover but says, "For he could have been anyone but for me he was unique, the first that's where I learned, I worshipped him... I kept scraps of his handwriting like saints' relics..." (142) She refuses Joe's marriage proposal, "he'd never asked whether I loved him, that was supposed to come first. I would have been prepared for that". (80) Men think marriage is a woman's destiny. Joe too does not ask for the opinion of the protagonist. Caroline Lachapelle in *Canadian Feminism Today* comments, "The oppressive clause deprives her of her cultural roots, creates division within her family and denies her access to any treaty or reserve privileges". (258). The protagonist's return to sanity and to human existence is marked by her recognition that she is neither animal nor primitive god and is therefore, incapable

of living alone in the wilderness. She feels that ultimately she has to abide by the dictates of society dominated by the male.

The narrator in *Surfacing* shows tremendous courage in her tirade against male oppression. The protagonist unwinds the camera film and throws it into the lake. Thus the protagonist shows what she is capable of. Her throwing away of the film roll symbolically suggests many things. Atwood remarks in *Survival*, "History and culture were things that took place elsewhere, and if you saw them just outside the window you weren't supposed to look." (26) In each novel, we are presented with women who attempt, with more or less success, to negotiate prevailing social rules and economic limits in order to arrive at some kind of self-realization and determination. However, the precise nature of these rules and limits varies greatly. It represents significant parallels between women's experience in different cultural and national contexts, but these parallels are always complicated by cultural specificity.

The society refuses to regard woman as a being, capable of her own desires and interests. "Feminism has crept into the country, not through theories and books, but through actual women's problems, through the attempts of some women, whom we would later call activists, to confront them and make them a public, not a domestic issue". (Deshpande 148) During childhood, a female must depend upon her father, during youth upon her husband, husband being dead upon her sons; if she has no sons, upon the near kinsmen of her husband, in default, upon those of her father; if she has no paternal kinsmen, upon the sovereign; a woman must never govern herself as she likes". (*The Laws of Manu* IX. 3) Thoughts like these occur to us when we read the novel under question by Atwood.

The protagonist discovers that after marriage women's exploitation, oppression and victimization gets sharpened. According to her marriage is nothing but a surrendering of values and distortion of the identity of a woman. In an interview, Atwood says, "It seemed to me that getting married would be a kind of death". According to Atwood, marriage should follow love. A marriage which is not based on mutual love is meaningless. The narrator says she was a fool to enter into the bond of marriage. But in reality she never got married. Jyoti Singh says "In a patriarchal social system, generally, marriage is projected as a norm and an end all and be all for women in the society". (146) A girl is habituated to think of marriage as her main goal in life.

What a woman resists is mediated by her situation, which is itself affected by gender, class, employment or poverty issues - so by definition, it can be argued that the gendered nature in which those women experienced colonialism and the way they are subjugated in the patriarchal society made them to resist the organized pattern. A.S Gill in *women's voice* propagates that "women are routinely being subjected to horrifying forms of humiliation in their own homes. To end all this and that women

need to be strengthened.” (91). The manipulation of male power plays a vital role in puncturing feminine identity in all aspects. Her throwing of the film role exhibits the submersion of women’s subjugation. Though immersed in the water of destruction again and again as the emergence of the body the woman come to the surface to survive. Vevaina comments on Atwood about *Surfacing* as “a kind of retreat from white civilization into a purer natural world” (33). Feminism seeks to dismantle patriarchy because of the continued inequity in rule of law societies which are the continuing subjugation and abuse of women in more traditional societies. Judith Bennett, in her recent work *History Matters* observes that patriarchy is the “central problem” of women’s history, and even “one of the greatest general problems of all history” (56). According to Walby, no other term is as useful to describe the “system” by which “men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (9).

According to men, a woman has no right to have a baby without a husband. When the pregnancy of the protagonist concluded not in childbirth but in abortion, the narrator felt emptied, amputated. In her search for identity, the narrator achieves her enlightenment. She rejects the male domination, the odious elements of civilization, its value, its clothing and its canned food. She rejects the world that has victimized her, and refuses to be a victim and creates her own reality. When all social constructs have lost meaning for her, she wishes to reduce living to its most elemental nature and retreats into primitive, animal-like state. Having lived as a divided self for a pretty long time, she is in a hurry for her “two halves” to be united. The baby she wishes to conceive will be her restored half and she succeeds in achieving her target.

The protagonist chooses the path of isolation and comes back to the city to face life. She emerges as a new woman. The protagonist is now aware of her colonized status. She gathers the courage to challenge traditional notions and detests the idea of being treated as a decorative piece or a commodity. The ending of the novel is ennobling indeed and is reminiscent of what Simone de Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex* - “Collectively they find the strength to shake off their chains; they negate the sexual domination of the males...”. (649)

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Resisting the Patriarchy in Mid-nineteenth Century Bengal: A Study of Widows in *Jugantar* (1895)

Bikash Chandra Mandal

Sivanath Shastri's *Jugantar* (End of an Era) (1895) is a novel of great significance set in the mid-nineteenth century colonial Bengal. The novel projects the struggle of women and especially the widows against the patriarchal discourses of the time. The nineteenth century represents a very important phase in the history of Bengal. Alok Ray, in his *UnishShatak: A Collection of Essays on Nineteenth Century Bengal* (2017) saw nineteenth century as a "transitional stage to move from those days to these days through various difficulties and hindrances" (Foreward 14). Sivanath Shastri captured that shift in the society that marked a significant change in consciousness of both the men and women of the time. The narrative opened at a small Brahmin-village, Nasipur in the district of Nadia and, then, it moved back and forth to other surrounding villages and, most importantly, to the city, Calcutta, the hub of so many nineteenth century movements that produced, as thought by some critics and scholars, the Bengal Renaissance. According to Baridbaran Ghosh in the "Introduction" to *Sivanath Upanyas Samagra* (1987), "*Jugantar* is a social novel" (n.p.) where we find the various contemporary social events like child-marriage, the *kulin* tradition, exploitation of child-wife, injustices towards widows and strict regulation of caste-system. The novel, *Jugantar* started in 1852 ending in 1859. That was the time when a "new patriarchy" (127), to use the words by Partha Chatterjee in his *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (1993), was emerging in Bengal among the English educated middle class that sought to validate and consolidate further the age old patriarchal discourses like caste system, marriage, widowhood, child marriage et al. leading to the subjugation of women in society. It was that new patriarchy that, as said by Anuradha Roy in her *Duhkhini Sati Charit: Unish Shataker Banglay Meyeder Upanyas* (2011), controlled or decided "everything about woman in the 'private sphere, like what they would eat and wear; what and how far they would read; how and at which age they should get married and when they should have their first sexual intercourse" (89). Binay Ghosh, therefore, in his *Banglar Nabajagriti* (Awakenig of Bengal) (2016) (in pages 157-58) said that there were no progressive changes of the social institutional power-structures as, caste system, joint family, the tradition of marriage, religion (with the further addition of widow-marriage and the concept of "new woman") under the social and economic changes of British rule. It is in the context that we need to realize the significance of the novel, *Jugantar* (1895)

that projects how the women in general and the widows in particular, despite their marginalization, resisted and protested from their limited space against those fundamental, social and patriarchal power-structures for the realization and formation of their individual female self denied by patriarchy. What is most interesting is that the struggle of the women as Bijoya, Bindhobasini, Krisnakamini, Matangini, Bhubaneswari, Bindubasini and Soudamini is not against any individual male but against the whole system of patriarchy in general and the widows, Bijoya, Bindhobasini, Krisnakamini and Matangini, if seen collectively, seem to effect a kind of “passive revolution”, to use Gramsci’s word.

Before proceeding to discuss the individual female characters and their struggle to dissent as presented in the novel, *Jugantar* (1895), it is necessary to understand the newly added discourse of the new patriarchy, the ‘new woman’ that was presented as a model for the woman in the society of nineteenth century Bengal. The ‘new woman’, as described by Partha Chatterjee in his *The Nation and Its Fragments : Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993), must have the “claims of cultural superiority...over the Western woman for whom ...education meant only the acquisition of the material skills to compete with men in the outside world and hence a loss of feminine (spiritual) virtues;...over the preceding generation of women in their own homes who had been denied the opportunity of freedom by an oppressive and degenerate social tradition; and...over women of the lower classes who were culturally incapable of appreciating the virtues of freedom”(129). So, for the woman in the mid-nineteenth century “Formal education became not only acceptable but, in fact, a requirement for the new *bhadramahila* (respectable woman)” (Chatterjee 128). No matters what she does like going to school or any public place or even doing job outside home, she must not deviate from “the essential femininity of women”(Chatterjee 130). One can see the presence of inherent irony implied in the patriarchal formation of the image of ‘new woman’, “The new woman defined in this way was subjected to a new patriarchy”(Chatterjee 127). However, the real interest of the novel lies in how the different women characters like Bijoya, Krisnakamini, Matangini, Bhubaneswari, Bindhobasini and Soudamini react to those patriarchal discourses and the construction of “new woman”. Their reaction contains conformity as well as resistance when their conformity too sometimes becomes a powerful critic of those new patriarchal constructions.

The narrative of Bhubaneswari, the daughter of a Brahmin is significant. She represented the tragedy of the traditional general Bengali woman. She grew up in a very loving, careful and comfortable situation at her father’s house with no work to do and nothing to worry about. She was denied education by her orthodox father and was married off at the age of ten as dictated by *shastra* (scripture) and *lokachar* (custom) to a man who had little chance of future prosperity having no interest in study. However,

the fact that he was a kulin Brahmin was enough proof of his eligibility in the match. The result was disastrous. Far from being a friend and companion to his wife, he began to rebuke, insult, beat and torture her mentally and physically. Her mother in law was equally vile and inhuman. But, Bhubaneswari, played on the role of a modest, docile and submissive Bengali wife who tolerated all kind of domestic violence without a word of protest. She took it as her destiny to suffer infinitely. The novelist, once, said of her, “she understood that her parent had thrown her into a burning fire all for her life, what was the point of relating her suffering to them? She had to suffer that pain till death. Sometimes, she wished to commit suicide due to the intolerable suffering” (169). Once, she thought, “It is not good for the woman to get married” (72).

The last statement is also applicable to Soudamini, the educated wife of an educated and successful man prone to extravagant and profligate living. She was suffering from extreme loneliness and hunger for love, sympathy and companionship of her husband. She depended on her brother-in-law, Nabinchandra for the emotional refuge and solace, “She does not get any love and care from her own husband, instead, she has to tolerate insults most of the time. This brother-in-law has been her sole companion in her sorrow and sadness for years. There is no such sadness that she does not tell to Nabinchandra. She cries before him after being insulted by her husband” (144). Therefore, at the news of Nabinchandra’s going away from them, her reaction was, “If You Go, who would look after me” (144). Anuradha Roy, in her *Dukhini Sati Charit* (Story of Sad Pure Women) (2011) said that in the nineteenth century “what to speak of conjugal love, in reality, it was not possible to establish any conjugal relation most of the time” (46). Not a single girl/wife married during the course of the novel is happy. That is how the critique of the institution of marriage emerges in this novel.

Bijoya is a woman of good taste, having her own distinct individuality and point of view. She was widow and remained so to the end of the novel. She was married to a liberal and educated man who taught her to read and write. She read many books of BrahmoSamaj, ‘Tatwabodhini Patrika’, many hindu religious texts. She tried to break all the tradition or faith that appeared wrong. But “only her faith on God and afterlife was never broken, rather, those tended to increase day by day” (29) and she “never behaved against *sanatani* traditions and customs and, she never wished to do so” (29). While staying at Biswanath Tarkabhusan’s house she was praised for her excellent skills in maintaining and managing the domestic works. The novel also highlighted her religious and spiritual mentality and self improvement through reading. This is also true in case of Krisnakamini who was much similar to Bijoya in many respects, though the former, a widow got married at last unlike the latter. The patriarchal construction of the ideal “new woman” can be seen in Bijoya and Krisnakamini for whom, according to Chatterjee, “Education then was meant to inculcate in women the virtues- the typically bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social form of ‘disciplining’- of

orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility...and the ability to run the house according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world” (129-30). Anuradha Roy, in discussing the novels by nineteenth century Bengali women novelist, in her *Dukhini Sati Charit* (Story of Sad Pure Women) said “the women education was never meant for the development of self but to help the patriarchy, for the “advantage of men, the development of society and nation” (47). This shows the duality and hypocrisy of the patriarchal discourses and hegemony.

However, both Bijoya and Krisnakamini seemed to resist the patriarchal social discourses in their own way. Bijoya through her resistance to widow marriage (which was supported by many educated elite, of which Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was the leader) and Krisnakamini through her daring act of loving a man and marrying even after being a widow attempted to break the chains of new patriarchy. However, Shaswati Ghosh, in her essay, “Sahamoron theke Brindabon: Rammohan O Bangali Bidhoba” in *The Awakening: A collection of Essays on Bengal Renaissance* (2016) edited by Sandipan Sen, reminded us, “not for all the widows, but only for the virgin widows the re-marriage was recommended, even by Vidyasagar” (196). In the novel, Panchu, an educated mind supported the movement of widow marriage as he thought it would remove the suffering of countless widows. But, Bijoya, herself a widow realized, “that the widows cannot marry is not the real cause of their sadness; but, most of the time, the fact that they have nothing to do, they always have to look up to and depend on others, is the matter of sadness”(109). This is very significant that points out that for the widows or any woman, the ultimate solution is not the marriage that patriarchy projected. Here, the main issue is that of independence of widows or women and for which they need education and work. So, she said that the marriage should not be compulsory for any one, rather, it should depend on individual will which is applicable to widows as well. She wished to find a place where “they can learn to read and write so that by learning various works, they can earn their living” (109). At the end of the novel, we find Bijoya, Bindubasini, her daughter and krisnakamini training the widows in a girl’s school for the profession of teaching. That is really a revolutionary in the so called patriarchal set up of society. Here, we can also get the hint of the failure of the widow marriage movement that failed to address the real and fundamental problem for the women suggesting the re-marriage as the hegemonic patriarchal solution that further wished to deny female autonomy.

The above statements of Bijoya in regard to widow marriage are significant since in all the debates regarding female questions in the early and mid-nineteenth century colonial Bengal, the female or woman’s point of views expressed by woman have never been thought worth considering or giving any priority. The debate regarding the ‘Sati’ (the burning of widows) and the widow-marriage also point the same kind of patriarchal indifference to female agency and voice.

The various reactions from different sources regarding the reform movements or the Bengal Renaissance in the nineteenth century Bengal confirm the negligence of woman's perspective by a woman. The another perspective, in the novel, hinted at the cause of the failure of the movement. The response of Biswanath Tarkabhusan to Vidyasagar's approval of the remarriage of the widows on the basis of Shastric argument is, "what is the point of Shastric argument in this kind of matter? Which work do we do according to Shastra? In such matters, the *deshachar* or the social practices and traditions are the deciding factor" (108). So, the society was more dependent on the social practices and customs, rather than the Shastric dictates. According to Badruddin Umar in *Iswarchandra Vidyasagar O Unish Shataker Bangali Samaj* (Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and Nineteenth Century Bengali Society) (2014) the failure of the reform movements in the nineteenth century Bengal was to be located in the 'class-character' and 'class limitations' of the reformers. Binoy Ghosh's opinion in *Banglar Nabajagriti* (New Awakening of Bengal) (2016) was, as there were no basic change of economic and social structures of Bengal under colonial rule, no such progressive changes in the social "institutional power-structures" (as the caste system, joint family, the tradition of marriage) were possible at that time. Asok Sen in his Preface to *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and His Elusive Milestones* (2016) said the ineffectiveness of the reformers like Vidyasagar was due to the emergent middle class's "...aspirations were caught up in its extreme dependence on unproductive means of livelihood and enrichment" (xx) and due to "...colonial constraints on Bengal's economy and society..." (xx). So, all these arguments, though very important, are marked by the absolute lack of space for the consideration of female perspective.

Krishnakamini Ghosh now twenty one has been a child-widow. She was educated and also took part in the religious, social and literary discussion of "Nabaratra Sabha" along with other male members in the novel. She developed an indomitable and courageous self that refused to accept all the traditions of widowhood fixed by patriarchy, as she refused to bath in the holy Ganges water and to worship an idol. Later, when she was taken by deception to Brindaban to force the life of widowhood on her but, she did not allow to cut her hair even after much pressure. She inwardly loved a man, Nainchandra Bosu who also loved her. So, responded positively when Nainchandra approached to her with the proposal of love and marriage. She is, thus, really a revolutionary character as love and, in this case, the love of a widow at that time was strictly against patriarchal society or the notion of widowhood. Her acceptance of a man of different caste sets a new ideal in marriage based on mutual understanding and companionship beyond the patriarchal notion of marriage, widowhood and caste purity.

Matangini, also a child-widow, turned twenty five or six now. She is even more active and vociferous in expression of her own emotions and desires though she does

not share the same kind of understanding power and intelligence of either Bijoya or Krishnakamini. She saw Nabinchandra earlier and felt attracted by his looks. She wrote a letter to Nabinchandra expressing her own love and proposing marriage in the manner suggested by Vidyasagar. But, she got rejected. Then, she got into an affair with another man, a son of a zamindar, Umashankar who poisoned her to death by a play of false love by the man. She actually seemed to represent one of the very natural and basic urge of human being, the urge for sexual satisfaction which was never considered by patriarchy of the society while prescribing the various norms of widowhood. There is subtle hint of such perspective in the novel. She is described by the novelist as, “born to topto kanchaner nai; sorirerup jeno fatiya poriteche” (123) which means her colour is like a burning... the beauty of her physical body is streaming out. Next, once she went to Nabinchandra’s room secretly when he was sleeping under a net, all alone by herself at mid night at about one or two o’clock and asked, “May I sit on your bed?” (126). These are the subtle hints of her natural desire for sex. Therefore, when she got rejected, she turned to another man who ultimately destroyed her. Probably, that was the only way out to control the female body of such radical widow like Matangini. The patriarchy always tried to control the female body and female sexually in every possible way by the patriarchal hegemonies, such as, through religion, glorification of the austerity of a widow, marriage and strict maintenance of caste system. Anuradha Ray in discussing the novels by women writer during nineteenth century Bengal in her *Dukkhini Sati Charit : Unish Shataker Banglaly Meyeder Upanyas* (2011) said in a questioning tone, “the question of female sexuality never comes. They are portrayed somewhat like a-sexual being” (79). But, in Matangini, we find a different characterization who exercised her autonomy over her body and sexuality though she was crushed by patriarchy at the end.

The most significant aspect for our understanding of the move against patriarchal hegemony taken by women like Bijoya, Krishnakamini and Matangini will be even more clear if we remember Sumit Sarkar’s view about the failure of widow marriage in his *Writing Social History* (1998). He said that, the failure of the movement is not due to any structural weakness, rather, “One needs to take into account also ‘the power of tradition that refused to be reformed’, as embodied in the hierarchies of caste and gender that were necessarily interlocked, since caste purity depended in large part on strict regulation of marriage and female sexuality” (220). So, in the context of the novel, *Jugantar* (1895), that caste purity and the patriarchal hold on marriage, female body and sexuality were attacked by Krishnakamini, a widow’s rejection of marriage or to remarry which was also followed by her daughter Bindhobasini, a child-widow and former student of Bethune School; by Krishnakamini Ghosh, a widow’s decision to love and marry Nabinchandra Bosu, a man of different caste; and by Matangini’s (also a widow) expression and exercise of her sexual instinct.

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Interrogating the Interface between Gender and Crime in Tabish Khair's *Jihadi Jane*

Abhisek Ghosal

I

Tabish Khair's interventions into gender stereotype in *Jihadi Jane* seem quite intriguing because he has made several attempts to dismantle parochial assumptions of patriarchy regarding women's ability to break free of socio-cultural confinements forged by religious fundamentalism and patriarchy itself. He has posited Jamilla in sharp contrast with Ameena—the two protagonists of the novel—whereas the former is an undeviating devotee of Islam all through the novel, the latter is, at the inception of the novel, introduced as a liberal-minded girl who will later yield to religiosity and patriarchy. Later on, being radicalized by *Hejjiye* on Internet, both the protagonists decide to leave home for Syria to work as wives for *jihadists*. Having landed down in Syria, Ameena and Jamilla are led to a *jihadi* camp where they are further indoctrinated by some radical agents. Whereas Ameena and Jamilla come in Syria to work as wives for *jihadists*, they are employed as potent agents by jihadists. In the novel, Khair has attempted to shatter certain gender stereotypes by bringing some radical female figures in it as opposed to docile Jamilla. He has unambiguously made attempts to liberate females featured in the central roles of the novel but has failed to dismantle gender stereotypes existing in the patriarchal society. This article is intended to bring out loopholes in Khair's attempts to dismantle gender stereotypes and to argue that Khair's interventions into the interface between gender and crime are flawed and contentious.

II

The opening up of global market economy has left substantial impact on the America's steady expansionism across the world. It allures America to pounce upon those nation-states which are struggling for attaining economic stability. It is supposed that economic expansionism is intently designed by America to neocolonize vulnerable nation-states by means of economy. Following the lethal strike at World Trade Centre on 9/11, the tension between America and Islam has got aggravated to such an extent that America has resorted to spread islamophobic thoughts among non-Muslim communities by means of virtual techniques. In this regard, one may be reminded of "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1997) by Arjun Appadurai who has brilliantly mapped out the complex operation of globalization, at different levels, in the following terms:

I propose that an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) ethnoscaples, (b) mediascaples, (c) technoscaples, (d) finanscaples, and (e) ideoscaples. (33)

What Appadurai has pointed out is that Globalization operates at different levels and is regulated by West. It can be argued that economic Globalization is devised to subjugate people belonging to developing nation-states. Prof Amartya Sen in “How to Judge Globalism” (2002) has accepted that economic Globalization has widened the rift between poor and rich and has failed to eradicate economic inequalities at local level although he opines that Globalization needs to be defended:

The central issue of contention is not globalization itself, nor is it the use of the market as an institution, but the inequity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements – which produces very unequal sharing of the benefits of globalization. (13)

There is another eminent scholar named Joseph E. Stiglitz who has recognized heterogeneities in understanding globalization across the world in “Globalism’s Discontents” (2002):

In many countries, globalization has brought huge benefits to a few with few benefits to the many. But in the case of a few countries, it has brought enormous benefit to the many. Why have there been these huge differences in experiences? The answer is that globalization has meant different things in different places. (16)

What is important here to notice is that none of these stalwarts could evade the fact that Globalization has generated dissents among poor people, at local levels, because of the unfair distribution of wealth and resources carried out by West. Roland Robertson has become critical of Globalization in *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992) and has argued: “Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (8). Here, one may put forward that economic inequalities perpetrated and projected by Globalization have led to the formation of organized criminal groups which intend to seize capital by illicit means. James H. Mittelman in *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (2000) as divulged the direct impinges of Globalization on growth and spread of organized crime in the following words:

The rise of transnational organized crime groups is spurred

by technological innovations, especially advances in commercial airline travel, telecommunications, and the use of computers in business, allowing for increased mobility of people – some of them carriers of contraband – and the flow of illicit goods. (210)

What it explicitly suggests is that organized crime is consequent upon the some operative forces of Globalization.

Robert G. Caldwell in *Criminology* has brilliantly encapsulated the salient traits of an organized criminal group and argued that organized crime is predicated upon a team work— a team which consists of a number of members and their positions are well defined in the team. Organized criminal group is governed by certain calculated arrangements and must have a ‘centralized authority’. It collects funds from various sources and uses them to execute its plans. Power structure is thus quite evident in an organized criminal group, and the members who enjoy restricted power and are positioned at lower ranks, are usually deployed at the front to carry out certain plans. What is important to mark here is that all the members of an organized criminal group, from top to bottom, are bound to take a vow to comply with certain rules and regulations within that group.

In order to problematize the interaction between Globalization and organized crime, the issue of gender can be brought up here because of the rise in number of the engagement of women in organized crime. Whereas Dr Sutherland is of this opinion that as women are more law-abiding citizens than men, they are likely to engage in organized crime less in number than men; Rita J. Simon in her book *Women and Crime* (1975) olds an altogether different view that women engage themselves with organized crimes because these crimes provide ‘occupational opportunities’ to them. At this point, it can be mooted that in an organized group, women are made subservient to men in power hierarchy and often are discriminated. One may straightaway refer to Thomas Strentz who has mooted: “The role of the female in these groups is historically that of a servant to the male . . . [who] does not consider a female as an equal” (18). Gender discrimination within an organized criminal group is corroborated by Charles A. Russell and Bowman H. Miller in the following terms:

. . . this frequent relegation of women to a support role is not the product of male chauvinism but rather practical experience. In the minds of most terrorist leaders, and as demonstrated by actual operations, women are simply more effective than men in such supporting activities [as operating a safe-house, storing weapons, or forging documents]. (85)

Linda L. Reif, too, upholds that “women face greater barriers to participation

and hence should participate less extensively than men... Women should tend to perform support roles". (154) The previous contention can be refuted by arguing that in recent time women are not discriminated within an organized criminal group and are treated as potent fighters who can vie with men in every respect. To substantiate this contention, one may refer to Georges-Abeyie who has argued: "We must recognize that women comprise a self-conscious, dynamic sector of our society which often perceives itself to be an oppressed majority. ... That oppression mirrors all of the ... classic conditions conducive of terrorist violence" (84). Involvement of women into organized crimes has been upheld and interpreted by Galvin as strategic step to bring about cataclysmic alterations within patriarchal framework:

... the decision to engage in terroristic activity or to join a terrorist group is often quite different for a woman than a man.... There is almost a natural progression towards terrorism.... Women take up terrorism on their own initiative because it seems to accord with their own interests Intense frustration is a strong motivator. When attempts to change socio-political situations by conventionally accepted means fail... women ... have turned to terrorism. (20-23)

Apparently, it seems to be a tenable contention because Deborah M. Galvin has persuasively tried to prove that engagement with organized crime can enable women to get rid of all sorts of conventionalities forged by patriarchy; Galvin can be contested by taking resort to De Cataldo Neuburger and T. Valentini, who have argued: "whatever the case, the fact is that participation in violent crime has never benefitted the cause of women" (1).

III

Tabish Khair in *Jihadi Jane* exclusively concentrates on the dual engagement of women protagonists with religion and organized crime thereby making an attempt to dismantle gender stereotypes. Jamilla and Ameena— the two protagonists— bear marked differences in their respective attitudes to religion. Whereas Jamilla is a devout devotee of Islam and performs all Islamic religious rituals along with her family members, Ameena is an unorthodox figure who is absolutely reluctant to yield to rigid religious framework and prefers to be driven by her free will. Khair has intently posited two contrasting figures in the novel so as to lay bare the loopholes in patriarchal assumptions of gender difference. Ameena is an intrepid girl right from her child hood and has been bearing an inclination to break free of religious and patriarchal structures. Being a Muslim girl, Ameena used to smoke in her school days: "In those days she was still smoking on the sly and necking with the boys behind the school building . . ." (Khair 6). In fact, Ameena had physical relationship even at the age of fifteen: "At fifteen (or

was she sixteen then?), Ameena was no longer a virgin. In that, she was like ‘one of them’ ”. (Khair 12) On the contrary, Jamilla is a reserved character whose life is regulated by both religion and patriarchy. Like orthodox girls, Jamilla used to visit mosque regularly for prayers: “He had always gone to the mosque on Fridays . . . he never took me, though some of his friends would let their daughters tag along . . . women have to pray separately from men . . . I learned to go to the mosque’s prayer hall only with other women and girls” (Khair 4). What comes out of Khair’s well-planned juxtaposition of two contrasting figure is that, on the one hand, Khair has exposed the prejudiced outlook of patriarchy which looks down upon Ameena’s indulgence in free will; on the other hand, Khair has attempted to dismantle patriarchal constructs backed up by religious fundamentalism. It is Jamilla who acts as a spokesperson of religious fundamentalism and patriarchy, turns critical of Ameena when she interprets Wendy Cope’s poem “Reading Scheme” in an unconventional manner. Jamilla said: “I used to find her ludicrous . . . she was an extreme believer in the Romantic notion of poetry . . .” (Khair 14). Apparently it seems that Khair has critiqued Ameena by allowing Jamilla to be critical of her interpretation, it is Mrs. Chatterjee who, on the turn, critiques Jamilla for making her interpretation replete with “. . . quotations from the Quran, the Hadith, and even one from the bible . . .” (Khair 17). It becomes evident that fundamentalist ideology backed up patriarchy is made subject to criticism for the time being and secularist ideology pertaining to gender wins instead. Khair has again problematized gendered viewpoints of patriarchy and shows that Ameena gives up her secularist ideology and yields to religion. This transformation in Ameena could be interpreted in two ways: either she has to choose religion to get over her psychological trepidations regarding her personal life conditioned by her breakup with Alex or she is radicalized by surrounding ambience including persuasive words from Jamilla. Here, one may be reminded of that secularist ideology germane to gender stereotype cannot win over religious fundamentalism. This contention can be validated by referring to Ameena who once used to brag of her secularist attitude, has to give in religion to evade glaring eyes of patriarchy.

Ameena quickly gets involved in virtual culture and starts to follow religious preachers who come on You Tube and Facebook. The direct impact of Globalization on the radicalization of ordinary women is quite evident and most interestingly, the technological forces of Globalization are being used to turn women against Western domination. Both the protagonists become actively involved in the radicalization process so much so that they cannot restrain themselves from listening to radical preaching:

. . . we surfed together for Islamic preaching on You Tube .
 . . . These were people who either preached a very strict
 version of Islam or highlighted the hypothesizes of the West:
 the political double standards, the arms industry, the orange-

clothed prisoners in places like Guatannamo, the lack of international democracy . . . Economics was just a pretext; finally they argued or suggested, that this was an attack on Islam and it was only a continuation of what had begun during the first Crusades. (Khair 30-31)

At this juncture, another argument can be made that the technological forces of Globalization have expedited the radicalization of Muslim women who are abetted to speak up against West. To substantiate the indelible impact of Globalization on the protagonists further, one may be reminded of how both the protagonists are successfully radicalized by *Hejjiye*, a recruiter of a political outfit run by *jihadists*:

Ameena was surfing the Internet when I got in. She was chatting with *Hejjiye*, who had been posting mysteriously about a great victory for Islam . . . *Hejjiye* had been urging women to join the faithful as wives in the holy fight. Women have a role to play in jihad too, she would tweet or post . . . if you were the wife of a martyr, you would be taken care of all your life. (Khair 73-74).

It is quite clear that that *Hejjiye*'s proposal is certainly gendered in nature in the sense that being a woman, she recruits a host of women to cater wives to male *jihadists* to satiate their the libidinal desire. *Hejjiye* admits: "I had unfriended one or two when they got too importunate" (Khair 74). What it implies is that although Khair has seriously attempted to liberate women from gendered structures approved by patriarchy, his effort seems to me contentious enough in that though a woman named *Hejjiye* is entrusted to recruit able wives for *jihadists*, she has to be subservient to *jihadist* groups which are predominately ruled by men and moreover, the selected women are, too, bound to follow the dictates of male *jihadists*. The orphanage where the protagonists have been accommodated with other chosen women seems to Ameena a better place because she thinks that it might facilitate them take "some advantages to a non-halal upbringing" (Khair 99). Ameena's expectations are fulfilled to some extent when both of them are allowed to use Internet. On the contrary, women in an organized criminal group such as *jihadist* group are relegated to a considerable extent and are not treated as equal to men. It can be proved by claiming that women are recruited not as fighters but as able wives to be physically exploited by men. It might lead one to question Khair's attempt to dismantle gender stereotype. Khair can be critiqued on the ground that he has not brought any figure in the novel to condemn *Hejjiye*'s role. It can be proved by arguing that Ameena who was once secular woman, later gives in religion and becomes the first to marry a *jihadist* among the two. Hallida informs that young women are being trained as suicide bombers to carry out casualties

on West. It is Ameena who tries to put up resistance to the training of being suicide bombers and said: “We cannot kill any innocent person and that too one who claims to be a Muslim” (Khair 180). It seems that Khair supports Ameena’s resistance until she is openly challenged Hassan. Ultimately, Ameena has to agree to be a suicide bomber simply because her rebellious voice is left unheard by *jihadists*. Opposed to the previous contention, one may point out that Khair’s effort goes in vain because Ameena could not stay indifferent to the compelling forces of patriarchy. This argument can be contested by on the ground that Jamilla becomes successful to stave off the blows of patriarchy by adhering to religious constrictions all throughout. This standpoint can be interpreted in support of Khair in that he has tried to exhibit the triumph of religious life over radicalization and liberation of women over gender discrimination found in organized criminal group. This contention does not seem to me tenable and can be refuted by referring to the realization of Jamilla, which is expressed at the end of the novel: “I wanted a place where I had no history, and where I could be with my beliefs without people who proscribed or prescribed” (237). It clearly shows that Jamilla does not feel that she is liberated from patriarchal bondage yet.

IV

Finally, at the close of this paper, one may pertinently put forward that Khair’s attempts to dismantle gender stereotype has explicitly fallen flat. Had it not been so, Jamilla would have confirmed her liberation from the tangles of gender discrimination. Having exposed Khair’s futile attempts, one may moot that gender stereotypes have been persisting all through the novel in that neither Ameena nor Jamilla is able to defeat patriarchy either during childhood or adulthood.

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A Study of Gender Inequality and Victimization of Women in India with reference to Anees Jung's *Unveiling India* and *Seven Sisters*

Sumana Mukherjee

Gender inequality can be defined as a denial of equal rights to both men and women, based on the social construction of their respective gender, where women are mainly the victims of discrimination. It has been observed that the traditional patriarchal rules and norms are one of the main causes of the marginalization of women both in public and private spaces. It has given rise to the increasing gender gap in our country and thus acts as a major stumbling block on the path of development and progress of women, with direct and indirect effect on their health, education, job and their overall development as individuals. In order to understand and analyze how patriarchy in society operates and gets institutionalized, controlling and victimizing the lives of women, it is important to understand the concept of patriarchy and its strange ways. Patriarchy has been defined differently by different thinkers. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* defined patriarchy in terms of public dimension: "The military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power within the society, inclusive the coercive force of police... [rests] in male hands" (Millet 25). She wanted to project how man shapes institutions primarily and individuals secondarily. According to Walby, the word patriarchy refers to a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby 20). V. Geetha in her book *Patriarchy* writes that patriarchy is a well-known term, which we often use in casual conversation whether in English or in any of the several languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent and the term implies 'male domination', 'male prejudice (against women)' or simply 'male power'. The term simply means "the absolute rule of the father or the eldest male member over his family" (Geetha 4). The definition of patriarchy which she gives in her book is as follows:

Patriarchy rests on defined notions of masculine and feminine, is held in place by sexual and property arrangements that privilege men's choices, desires and interests over and above those of the women in their lives and is sustained by social relationships and cultural practices which celebrate heterosexuality, female fertility and motherhood on the one hand and valorise female subordination to masculine authority and virility on the other (Geetha 8).

Even the Anglo-European anthropologists writing in the nineteenth century used this term widely to refer to the social system where men were heads of the family, the descent was reckoned through the father, men alone were priests and all laws and norms were dictated by what male elders in the community held to be just and right. The term patriarchy has often been contrasted with the term 'matriarchy' which means a social system in which women exercised political power over men or they possessed power and exerted control over social relationships and everyday life. Slowly matriarchy began to be considered an earlier and more "primitive" stage of society, and patriarchy a more advanced stage of existence (Geetha 4-5). Therefore, with the slow advent of the patriarchal system in our society, began the process of degeneration and victimization of women.

Indian women have been the victims of various kinds of oppression and violence, suffering within the family and also outside, at workplaces and on the streets. They have remained subjugated due to various social, economic and political prejudices. The patriarchal hold over the family, child marriage, dowry, domestic violence, illiteracy, discrimination at home and at office, disempowerment, invisibility, gender inequality emerges as some of the major obstacles on the path of their development. This is not the situation only of a single country. In almost all the underdeveloped and developing countries, the story remains the same. The reasons behind their suffering are that they are illiterate and ignorant of their own civil rights, freedom, and interest. Though Independence brought an end to various colonialist political, social and economic mechanisms of control and dominance yet women did not achieve independence. They were still suffering under the rule of their father in their infancy, under husband after getting married and in household and society through their lifetime. They have remained prisoners in the hands of the existing patriarchal system. So, the need arises to break away from all the shackles of servitude and free themselves from the clutches of this system.

Thus, we find that patriarchy was rooted in our culture and society since a long time and it gave rise to sexist oppression and gender discrimination towards women, based on the fact that they are responsible for giving childbirth and for nurturing the same. They consider women and their body accountable for their subordinate status in society. If critically evaluated, one will find that the roles assigned to the male and female, or the gendering of a boy or a girl and the thought process which has developed in people regarding the inferiority of female sex or the superiority of the male, is completely a social and cultural construction and not biological. Traditionalists believe that the sexual asymmetry which exists between man and woman is natural and universal, thus unalterable. Their explanation focuses on "woman's reproductive capacity and sees in motherhood woman's chief goal in life, by implication defining as deviant women who do not become mothers" (Gerda Lerner 17). But the female and

a male body cannot set their behavioural codes of conduct, cannot determine what roles they should play. Just because a woman has the power to bear a child and feed them, just because of menstruating, categorizing a woman body as weak and vulnerable and determining their roles based on that, has not been welcomed by the educated women and feminist writers of the Western, Eastern and other Third World countries. It is these kinds of generalizations which are consistently being challenged by feminist scholars and activists. On the basis of their research work, they found that biological facts like sexual asymmetry do not in any way affect male dominance and female subordination; rather it is the social construction which creates such discriminations, as pointed out by the famous feminist Simon de Beauvoir in her work, *Second Sex*. She says that:

One is not born a woman but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in the society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (Beauvoir 249)

By the above statement, she meant that gender roles are predetermined, they are social construction and not biological. Here she mainly wants to bring out how the social thinking, the existing stereotypes gradually shapes and constructs the gender identity and the myths which become a rigid framework of “sexual monism” of Freud and “economic monism” of Engels (Barret 52). Kamla Bhasin in her book *Understanding Gender* firmly affirms that:

*If a woman can cook,
So can a man,
because a woman doesn't cook with her
Womb!* (Bhasin 5)

She also admits that it is due to these social constructions that women are given inferior status in society, where women are the victims of biasness at every sphere.

They enjoy fewer rights, control fewer resources, work longer hours than men but their work is either undervalued, or underpaid. They face systematic violence at the hands of men and society; and they have little decision-making power in social, economic and political institutions. (Bhasin 6)

Thus, we find that gender has become the main issue of the existing inequalities, and violence against women still being blindly practised by most of the people in and around the world. The differences may relatively be more or less, and the kind of

inequality being practiced may also vary, but on analysing it minutely, one finds that there are some broader areas or a particular pattern along which both these binaries get differentiated across people, time and place. The inequalities exist at various levels starting from inequality at home, to that of the workplace, from labour works to office works, from dirty politics of the inside world to the power politics of the outer world. Apart from all these inequalities, gender discrimination also exists in the form of violence that is being inflicted upon the women folk either in the domestic sphere in the form of wife-battering, abuses, marital rape and others, or in the public sphere where rape, sexual harassment, eve teasing, and others become the ways of subordinating the women and in creating the category “other” in comparison to men. The question is not only of stopping the existing inequalities, but it is also about analysing the reason behind women remaining silent and becoming the passive victims of male power.

Therefore, in order to remove such gender inequality and injustices against women and to give voice to such unheard and unnoticed voices only, feminism as a movement came into being. Initially, it started as a movement in the West, with its emphasis on women’s rights and freedom. The main stand taken by feminist was to resist the power structure and the generalisations regarding women, created by the society giving rise to the existing inequalities between men and women. It entered into the academic and activist framework to fight against the system that has been prejudiced against women and their causes for a long time. It is not simply a movement for forming a new idea about women, it is rather a move taken for the development of the power to speak and express themselves, to provide space to the women, to ponder and think about their own self, their own choice and desire and give an outlet to the same, in order to remove all sort of negativity attached to the word feminine. The ambiguity noted by Irigaray, is expressed in Kristeva when she suggests - In “woman” I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something that is above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies (Cornell and Thurschwell 149). In India, like in the West, feminist movements had started to gain equal socio-economic and political rights and to seek for women, gender equality, equal wages, equal opportunity to health and education and freedom and independence to make their own choices. Unlike in the West, women in India had to undergo a lot of struggle against the strong hold of the patriarchal system manifested in society through practices like child marriage, sati system, female infanticide and dowry system, restrictions on education and mobility, and laws like the inheritance law among other things. A woman has always been kept at a distance, her wishes and desires have been ignored, her choices have never been given preference, and even when she has tried to raise her voice for gaining her own rights and freedom, it has always been suppressed. The gender hierarchy which has been existing in our society is so much biased that it has always tried to keep the woman outside the periphery. So, in order to do away with such injustices only, feminists

in India have and still are raising their voices to provide justice and equality to women on all grounds. Anees Jung is also one such feminist who through her works have raised her voice against the patriarchal society and the injustices against women through the narratives, that she recorded during her interviews with women of our country. Therefore, based on her works I would discuss in the rest of my paper those stories of women, who being victims of gender inequality continue to suffer from injustices, violence, torture, discrimination in their day to day lives.

In our country, we find that one of the main reasons for gender inequality lies in the fact that how a woman is perceived by the society. Overemphasis on the construction of women sexuality and to maintain the gender hegemony, are some of the reasons for women exploitation. It is through social beliefs and customs, cultural and religious constructions of gender identities that conventional images of male superiority and female inferiority are being maintained. From the birth of a newborn baby itself, the process of gendering starts, initially at home and then in the society. It is interesting to note how this whole process works, or how this hierarchical hegemony passes on from one generation to other. When a baby boy is born, the birth is celebrated; whereas the birth of a baby girl is bemoaned. It must be remembered that “*the mother who is worshipped is the mother of sons and not of daughters*. This theme is recurrent in all dimensions of Indian life; in mythology, powerful women like Kunti and Satyawati are mothers of sons, not daughters” (Channa 94). Anees Jung in the chapter “Mothers and Children” of *Unveiling India* also give reference to hymns which prays only for the birth of male sons and which appeals to God to magically change the sex of the child to male, in case it is a female (Jung, *Unveiling India* 70). For example, in Atharvaveda 8, 6, 25, there are prayers which recite the birth of boy rather than girls. The reason why the society gives so much importance to the birth of sons is first that son is considered to increase the lineage of the family and secondly due to the Hindu ritual of *mukha-agni*¹ and *sraddha*². It is believed that these rituals can only be performed by sons and it is only son, who by performing these rituals can save his father from suffering in the life hereafter. According to Manusmriti, “Because a son delivers his father from the hell called *put*, he is therefore called *put-tra* (a deliverer from *put*)” (Buhler 138). These are some of the reasons behind discrimination between a boy and a girl in Indian family and society. This reality was reflected even in an interview of Anees Jung with two doctors of Jamkhed, who said how the birth of girl child remained unwelcomed there. When women were asked how many children they have, they often mentioned the number of children without counting the girls. This brings the bitter truth of our prejudiced and unequal society (Jung, *Unveiling India* 101).

It differs from culture to culture, from place to place. There is also discrimination in the way boys and girls are treated, the way they are dressed, and the privileges that

are made available to a girl and a boy. "In early childhood girls typically play with dolls, do playful cooking and other household chore consistent with their 'female role'. Girls are considered '*Paraya Dhan*' and therefore need to be groomed in such a manner that they can suitably adjust in the family whose membership acquired on marriage" (Shrivastava 175). Leela Dube in the chapter "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India" talks about such roles laid down by our society through which women sexuality is being regulated.

Considerable importance is attached to the way a girl carries herself, the way she sits, stands and talks, and interacts with others. A girl should walk with soft steps; so soft that they are barely audible to others. Taking long strides denote masculinity. Girls are often rebuked for jumping, running, rushing to a place and hopping.... 'Don't stand like a man' is a common rebuke to make a girl aware of the demands of femininity. (Dube 176)

This is how the gendering process operates in our society to maintain the gender hierarchy whereby men dominate and women get subjugated. "Gender relations therefore are relations of dominance and subordination with elements of co-operation, force and violence sustaining them. This is so because most societies are patriarchal and male dominated" (Bhasin 27). This way, discrimination in the society and family, that starts with the childbirth continues, and in future leads to the construction of gender roles where men start considering themselves superior to women. Thus, gender inequality sets foot in society. Kamla Bhasin in her book *Understanding Gender* also explains the above viewpoint by quoting Aristotle.

Aristotle called the male principle active, and the female passive. For him a female was a "mutilated male", someone who does not have a soul. In his view the biological inferiority of a woman also makes her inferior in her capacities, her ability to reason and therefore to make decisions. Because the male is superior and the female inferior, men are born to rule and women born to be ruled. Aristotle said "The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying". (Bhasin 10)

Moreover, the social system tries to further subjugate women through the process of socialisation. It makes them follow various rituals and practices and a certain code of conduct, of which they are the silent victims. In order to justify and institutionalize these practices, to make them part of the social norms and structures, religious scriptures and texts are used as a tool. Leela Dube has highlighted these things through the

various examples of rituals being in practice in various parts of India. The notion of girl's residence being temporary in their natal home is made clear through the various religious celebration like Durga Puja in West Bengal or Gauri Puja in Karnataka, where the belief is that the girls come to their natal home for few days leaving their husband's house and then again leave their natal home and return with a heavy heart (Dube 168). These things teach the girls to consider their husband's house only as their true house after marriage and also to abide by the wishes of her husband and in-laws.

All these rituals are accompanied by the significance of the purity, virginity, and chastity of the pre-pubertal girls. Anees Jung in her work *Seven Sisters: Among the Women of South Asia* has given an example of how religious ties bind women in the name of protecting them from being susceptible, and purity and virginity have been defined as an ideal to judge a woman's character. Giving an example of such a ritual in Nepal, India's neighboring country, Anees Jung narrates that:

A tiny girl— a child— is elevated to the status of a living goddess in front of whom even the king bows. But the moment she ceases being a virgin she finds herself demoted, often to live like an outcast, in penury and oblivion. (Jung, *Seven Sisters* 14-15)

This is how the socialization of girls is being done in Indian society, by making the religion as a tool for communicating these ideals and values and also for limiting women movements as well. Women and women's body, therefore, has been a problem for herself, for her family and her society as well. Apart from considering the birth of baby girl inauspicious, her marriage, her widowhood, her body functions including menstruation, fertility concept related to motherhood and every other aspect is marked by various superstitious beliefs, practices, values, and rituals, and through these rituals only women get victimized in society. When a girl enters her puberty, menstruation starts and with that a girl is being treated as the most vulnerable object by the family and society. From that time onwards, socialization of women starts with restriction being imposed on the way she dresses, the way she talks and eat, the way she sits, the places that she visits and the people that she interacts with and several others, in order to ensure that they remain in inferior position to that of men in all spheres of life, even in case of choices and decisions as well. All this is done also with the purpose of marriage and for maintaining her purity and chastity of her body.

Any attempt to question the dominance of male authority at any of these levels runs the risk of endangering domestic peace and tranquility and may ultimately lead to the break-up of the family itself. Women are, thus, socially conditioned to be submissive and docile. (Shrivastava 175)

With marriage, the condition of women worsens further. She is required then to maintain the image and respect of both the families and her sole duty becomes to please her husband and his family members, even at the cost of the sacrifice of her own wishes and desires. “In becoming a ‘better half’ she comes to lose her own ‘other half’” (Shrivastava 176). The society expects that only women should make sacrifices for husbands and family’s welfare. Man thinks that they are meant mainly for looking after the outside domain and so any problem related to women or inner domain are generally neglected by them. This creates inequality between men and women. Taking family duty as a shared responsibility is yet to emerge among the couples of India. Early marriage and motherhood among Indian girls put their lives on stake. To match themselves to the constructs of ideal womanhood, women suffer from unequal access to nutrition and healthcare. Since ancient times till today in Indian families women eat at the last, after all the male members complete eating their food. So, the women eat only the leftover food at the end leading to malnutrition and poor health of women, sometimes even death. “Like the river that does not drink its own water. Or the tree its own fruit. It takes seven colours to make a rainbow and perhaps as many strains to form an “ideal” woman” (Jung, *Unveiling India* 59). Global Gender Gap Report 2017 also maintains that inadequate nutrition and lack of access to healthcare are some of the biggest problems that Indian women face. It is only when the women raise their voices claiming for equal rights and freedom, that they are put to silence by the male society through various forms of violence both inside and outside the house. At home, violence like physical and mental torture, use of abusive language and others, are inflicted over women due to various factors like patriarchal hold over the family where men’s decisions are final and women decisions are not heard, torture inflicted on brides by her -in-laws either due to dowry, or demand for son’s preference or meta-preference leading sometimes even to heinous crimes like female foeticide and female infanticide or infertility, and similar other reasons. Women are victims of inequalities not only at home, but also outside home as well. “Violence against women is committed at workplaces, educational institutions, in public transport, and on streets” (Shrivastava 176). All these violence’s and inequalities establish various social restrictions which create a lot of problems for girls, especially in their growth and in their education.

These constraints of space and time create problems for middle class girls in terms of choice of schools/colleges and courses demand are frowned upon – coeducation and staying out till late which certain courses demand are frowned upon – and consequently, in their choice of careers. (Chanana 178)

These factors have also been used to create separation between public and

private spaces. According to the social norms, private domain was meant for women, whereas public sphere was for men, with a control over the private sphere as well. Street corner, paan shop, football ground, cinema and theatres were considered spaces only for men. On the other hand, if a woman has to go out anywhere she has to be accompanied by some male member of the family. The women were confined mainly to one side of the house, generally known as “antahpur” or “zenana” in Urdu (Chanana 44). They began to be considered as preservers of social and cultural values. For them there was no space for entertainment or for work, where they could relax themselves after the days’ chores or can involve into some discussion. This division of spaces, also led to disparity with regard to education and job as well. It was emphasized that, the duty of women was only to look after household chores, thus education and job were not meant for girls. The burden of dowry and the very thought of women going to their husband’s home after marriage, often prevented parents from spending their money on daughter’s education. Even with regard to jobs, the thinking was the same. The concept of considering the women as the honour of the house also prevented parents from allowing their daughters to go outside either for education or for job. The very fear of staining the reputation of the family if the women of the family is harassed or sexually exploited by the outsiders, also a stumbling block on the path of women progress. Apart from this, women were also the victims of male ego, whereby they felt that if women of a family go out to earn by doing job, then it was a question over the inability of the male members of the family to support their wives or daughters. It is due to such beliefs and gendering process of the patriarchal society only that women of our country suffer so much. Although with modernity, development of technology and education, lot of changes have already been noticed regarding women access to education and job, yet many restrictions and question are still aroused regarding their movement in public spaces. Therefore, the need to emphasize on the women education to make them aware of their rights and position in the society, and for their overall development in the field of education, health, work, and others, so that gender inequality can be minimized by emancipating women of our country.

Although since 1970 onwards, feminist and various NGOs like SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association) and others, championing women causes have continuously been raising their voices against inequality and injustices for redressing women’s problems regarding their life, health, economy, education, job prospects and their relation to the family and many government schemes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Maternity benefit scheme, Mahila E- Haat, and various other legislation and policies have also been introduced for empowering women. Yet a lot of gender inequalities and violence still persists in various other forms. Therefore, the need is not only to modify the hegemonic power imbalances in our society through further researches, discussions and implied legislations for women emancipation, but also to

bring both men and women on an equal forum, from where they can fight together to galvanize the continued battle against gender inequalities, for uplifting the weaker sections of the society and for developing a more equitable economy of our country. In this light, Anees Jung's works have been helpful in not only highlighting the existing inequalities in societies but have also helped in better understanding of the problems for bridging those gaps which victimize women as a whole, with special emphasis on women education for making them self-dependent and aware of those human rights which are necessary for achieving our shared vision of an equal, unbiased and safer world.

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Notes:

1. *mukha-agni* – It is a death ritual where the fire is put to the mouth of the dead at the cremation ground.
2. *sraddha* – This refers to the rituals performed by son on the memorial of dead parents.

Revisiting Modernity through Feminist Lens: Reading Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line*

Basundhara Chakraborty

In the dominant discourse governing twentieth century Indian literature, the representation of female characters drew heavily on the Victorian ideal of Womanhood. Though the Edwardian ideal of the New Woman was recognized by some but still the figure of the all sacrificing, meek, docile epitome of ideal womanhood loomed large over the literary arena. The New woman with her desexualized body and carefully disciplined mind was seen to honor the dominant socio-cultural order and became the epitome of progress and modernity of the nation heading towards independence. Sonia Nishat Amin writes:

None of the constructions of the New Woman was free from the ambivalence and anxiety that society felt toward this phenomenon. How far could she be allowed to go, striding/gliding through the pages of literature, as she did? These anxieties were caught by writers Hindu, or Muslim, male or female (129).

But there were some writers who refused to get caught by the cobweb of these anxieties and Ismat Chughtai was the foremost among these writers. She used her pen to subvert the dominant discourse and “think with modernity against modernity” (Lazarus 6). Sukrita Paul Kumar writes:

Writing in the man's world, delineating mostly the microcosm of the women, discerning women's modes for empowerment or looking at women as victims of exploitation by men or other women in the patriarchal society, Ismat entered the literary scene as though sounding a clarion call for awareness and change (15).

The present paper intends to study one such narrative of “awareness and change” - *The Crooked Line* (1943), her magnum opus, as a counter-narrative to the meta-narrative of progress and modernity. Written in Urdu as *Tehri Lekir*, *The Crooked Line* (translated into English by Tahira Naqvi) highlights the incompleteness of the project of reformation and modernity undertaken by middle class reformist-Patriarchy that claimed to have resolved the ‘woman's question’. The present paper will study

how moving through the ever-widening circles of the body, sexuality, desire, home, reformation and the nation, Chughtai imagined her female protagonist as a historical body, who actively participate in her self-making.

Constructed as a bildungsroman, *The Crooked line* revolves around Shaman who comes of age at the tempestuous time of the history of civilization – during the first decades of the twentieth century, when to use Marxist terminology “all that is solid” is “melting into air”. As Priyamvada Gopal reminds us, it is a time when the nation was heading towards Independence/Partition and the socio-political scenario in the world outside was also marked by turmoil – in Russia there was the rise of communism, the tide of socialism reached the shore of Asia and Europe and in Asia and Africa the rise of anti-colonialist marked the beginning of a new era (69). And setting her narrative in this socio-cultural background, Chughtai presents the transition of her protagonist from a gendered colonial subject to gendered national citizen as she comes to an understanding of self and structure while trying to inhabit the role of a ‘new’ middle class woman (ibid). Presenting her protagonist as a middle class woman, the class whom the liberal-nationalist patriarchy claim to have emancipated through their reformist projects, Chughtai points out the oppressive nature of these projects of reformation that only replaced the older kind of patriarchal measures with a new one. Shaman like Chughtai herself refuses to be an object of reformation, rather it is her constant battle against repression and search for a new order where she can attain a subjective position, that the novel propels on. Thus Chughtai presents her female protagonist as a desiring modern subject who resists the oppressive measures of middle class reformatory project that de-sexualized women’s bodies. Her whole life is a complete subversion to the normative middle class ideal of ‘woman’ as instead of abiding the patriarchal ideals obediently, Shaman searches for an alternative to express her sexual desire and gain autonomy over her own life. The title of the novel appropriately draws our attention to this search of her : Shaman’s repeated attempts to recast herself and her existence into a ‘straight’ (rational, controlled, ordered) rather than a ‘crooked’ (chaotic and unpredictable) line are emblematic of her relationship to the project of becoming modern (Gopal 81).

From the very outset of the novel Shaman is presented as a ‘crooked line’, an iconoclast. She arrives into the world before time thwarting her mother’s desire to have an English midwife (a sign of the family’s emergence into modernity) for delivery and making the omniscient narrator remark: “To begin with, her birth was inopportune” (Chughtai 1). This very first sentence of the novel initiates the reader into the world of the novel where no one rejoices at the birth of a girl child, as the reaction of Shaman’s widowed elder sister is worth mentioning: “May God curse this baby sister! Why won’t Amma’s womb close up now?” (Chughtai 3) Thus from the first page of her narrative Chughtai presents the domestic space as a site of oppression for the

womenfolk of the nation contrary to the claim of the reformist nationality. It is a place where women are turned into nothing less than reproductive bodies (as happens with Shaman's mother with her multiple pregnancies); the birth of a girl child is never welcomed and the elder women are over burdened with their household duties. The rejection and indifference Shaman receives at her birth haunts her throughout her life and leads her onto being 'the crooked line'. The early sign of her crookedness i.e. desire for the female body is presented by Chughtai as a direct outcome of her mother's indifference towards her. The first woman for whom she feels desire is her wet-nurse Una and Chughtai gives a graphic description of Shaman fantasizing Una:

In front of her, behind her, all around her she saw Unnas
and more Unnas; mad with joy she leapt eagerly from one
lap to the next. Then suddenly all the Unnas disappeared.
Her spirits drooped, and, sniffing around like a hungry bitch,
she began looking for Unna. (Chughtai 3)

Beautiful and young Una appears to her as "fleshy and ripe like a mango", she "burrows" herself into Unna's "rounded softness, her lips gulping down great quantities of milk" (Chughtai 3). "The embodied language used in this section", as Kathleen Fernando explains, "conveys Shaman's desire to physically connect with a mothering figure and so to become whole; the fundamental absence of maternal love haunts Shaman as she grows into an adult" (95). But Shaman has to replace this mothering figure with another – when Una is made to leave her job upon being caught having sex with her lover, Manjhu, one of her elder sister becomes her care-giver and soon the center of her attraction.

Soon Shaman's 'crookedness', her 'difference' become a source of anxiety for the other women in the household as their repeated attempts to mould her according to the middle class gender norms go futile. Since early childhood she is seen to subvert the middle class gender norms accorded with female body and sexuality. Undermining Manjhu's arduous efforts to discipline her, Shaman "reappear[s] in the evening looking like a mad bitch who had just finished tossing about in an earthen platter filled with sludge", with her frock "resembling a dead rat's skin, its surface decorated with a shower of fine Dust" and her nostrils "so densely packed with snot and muck they reminded one of the doors walled in with cement" (Chughtai 7). The third person narrator puts her rebelliousness in a highly figurative language as Shaman is said to have tempted by "Satan" to submit to the "red mud in the fields", the "dirty, foul smelling chicken coop" and the "moist fragrant grass in the stables" (Chughtai 6). Gopal argues:

A classed patriarchal order that demarcates female sexuality
itself as 'impure' and as such, resonant of the gross

physicality of the lower castes and classes, puts in place a taboo that simply fuels the child's desire for dirt and bodies (71).

Shaman's refusal to 'clean' herself by following the patriarchal normative can be read "both symptom of her difference and a very visceral desire to become whole" (Fernando 98).

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler argues that "the notion that there might be a "truth" of sex, as Foucault ironically terms it, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms" (24). She contends that

The hetero-sexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine", where these are understood as expressive attributes of "male" and "female". The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex, and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. "Follow" in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. Indeed precisely because certain kinds of "gender identities" fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain (24).

Refusing to conform to the behavioral demands that Reformist middle class patriarchy expected her to follow, Shaman appears as a "developmental failures or logical impossibility" that Butler talks about. Her inquisitive mind is subjected to humiliation and criticism and her unwillingness to learn alphabets is interpreted as an outcome of her abnormality. These early experiences of censure and disciplining played an instrumental role in shaping Shaman's consciousness as Fernando argues "the process of self-making for Shaman is fraught with struggle and contradictions, where her gender identity, linked to her sexuality, is viewed as being dangerous, disgusting, and filthy" (101). In addition to turning her into a middle class subject, these negative experiences help Shaman to emerge as a thinking body and constitute her subjectivity (Mellor and Shilling 23). Chughtai in a highly figurative language highlights the process of her emergence as an independent being:

Having rent the earth's bosom, the miniscule seedlings had

finally sprouted. A few among them were completely bent, their backs hunched over as if someone were dragging them down. Shaman tried to straighten them by supporting them with twigs, but they immediately snapped in the middle. That day her spirit drooped and, sitting next to the vegetable patch, she spent most of her time scrutinizing the struggle of the buds to emerge from the earth... One in particular was pulling itself out just like a live worm and within minutes emerged like a baby snake slithering out its hole. Shaman breathed a sigh of relief, as if she was the one making all the effort...sometime later [the nose bob of the coriander seed]...snapped itself off and by later afternoon the bud was standing tall, stretching out its arms like a victorious soldier (27-28).

Thus “drawing on images of birth, labor, suffering and destruction . . . the narrative . . . foreshadows the process of self-reflexivity that becomes constitutive of Shaman’s modernity” (Fernando 106).

From now on, Shaman is seen in constant negotiation with the cultural imperatives of Reformist-patriarchy. Her desire to educate herself takes her outside the oppressive atmosphere of the home but her move outside the familial home does not guarantee her freedom from the shackles of sexual norms of patriarchy. As the early experiences in her life made her realize that “to love someone or have someone love you was a farce” (Chughtai 47), Shaman used to “flee from love the way a young bird flees from the noise flapper” (Chughtai 47). Yet there she experiences a kind of love whose expression and practice is prohibited according to the gendering norms of society – homosexual desire. The affectionate behavior of her teacher Miss Charan awakened in Shaman her infantile fantasy for a mother figure: “She is sleeping, Miss Charan is petting her. She is thirsty, her throat is parched and Miss Charan is squeezing cold and fragrant juices into her mouth...Thoughts of Miss Charan possessed her like an illness”(Chughtai 74). Conditioned by the patriarchal culture, Shaman is unable to name her desire for Miss Charan and when Miss Charan is dismissed from her job after Shaman is discovered in her room in the middle of the night, Shaman decides that “the fault lay somewhere within her and she was ready to accept that fact now” (Gopal 75). But soon she learns to experience and express her homosexual desire within the framework of female friendship in the feminine space of all-girls school. Ashwini Sukhantar in *Facing the Mirror* reminds us that

[T]he terms historically used to describe women who love women—such as sakhi and saheli—have been purged of

their eroticism over time and reshaped into harmless descriptions of female friendship, so that today we find ourselves banished from language itself, literarily (Sukhantar xvi).

Shaman's banishment from this homosexual sanctuary comes when she follows her friend Bilques' advise that girls "should be crazy about boys not girls" because "we can marry them and live with them forever" (Chughtai 78). And here begins her journey as a heterosexual being and the second phase of the novel traces her heterosexual encounters.

The sense of alienation that inflicted Shaman since her childhood becomes all the more acute in the second section of the novel when she realizes the debilitating consequences of the institution of compulsory heterosexuality on the lives of women. She is quick enough to recognize the resemblance between a married woman and "a cow" (Chughtai 182) and presents her niece Noori's marriage thus:

[H]aving made a deal for her youth for a mehr of ninety-one thousand rupees, [Noori] was now leaving with a man. Not like some fool, but all proper with signatures on paper so that if she writhes painfully later the noose on her neck can be tightened (Chughtai 182).

Contrary to the propaganda by the reformist-patriarchy that presents the middle class home as a liberating, enlightened place, Shaman finds her natal home to be a replication of the disordered nation: "Meals were taken sitting on the floor, grain was stored in bathrooms, baths taken in enclosures secluded by hanging a curtain and everything was in a state of disrepair" (Chughtai 258). Thus Shaman, 'struggling to make sense of the antinomy of modernity and the "morbid symptoms"—to use Antonio Gramsci's phrase—that result from these antinomies' (Fernando 120), finds the middle class home of her as a source of constant despair. These despairing experiences played an instrumental role in shaping Shaman as a modern subject, as Fernando reminds us "Shaman's modernity is constituted by a rejection of the oppressive, patriarchal modalities operative in the middle class home" (120). Chughtai writes: "[in her] flat, silent, stony breast...there existed the hidden embers of rebellion and self reliance... a smouldering fire just awaiting to be awakened" (185). And the rest of the narrative records Shaman's attempt to attain modernity by transgressing the shackles of the domestic space. But this journey of her is replete with struggle. Her first job as a headmistress of a school makes her aware of the disintegrated state of the nation itself. When her repeated attempts to rebuild the school as an orderly place fail, she feels as if "some unknown force was at work" (Chughtai 215) against her and finds the deplorable state of the school to be microscopic version of the destitute state of

the nation itself:

This unspeakable condition reminded her of Hindustan's general malaise. Don't government officers stretch out on charpoy and chatter, while on the desks the same old spicy, oily snacks and tea are served? On the desks like mismanaged registers smudged with turmeric and ghee stains, dried out inkwells, crooked nibs, cracked holders which are used more often for inserting drawstrings through pyjama waistbands than writing. Meanwhile Germany decided to bathe the world in blood in order to purify it. Poland was divided, and as for the rest of the world, how many more days will it remain whole? Who really cares if Hindustan remains whole or breaks? Isn't there enough breakage in the world? (Chughtai 258)

Disillusioned by the revolutionary ideas of her comrades and dejected at not being able to create an inclusive, productive environment of growth in her workplace, Shaman feels betrayed, yet she attempts to attain subjectivity:

Shaman lay down straight on her back...The spine, accustomed to bending along special curves, had to keep itself straight...'No... every curve will be erased, this crookedness will have to be straightened,' she ordered and slipped into a deep sleep that had evaded her for years (Chughtai 277).

Shaman's search for integrity is carried forward in the concluding section of the novel. Here she is presented as a lone traveler who observes and reflects on the past and present as well. Her life of a traveler comes to an end with her marriage to an Irish soldier Ronnie Taylor. This inter-racial conjugal relationship of her is doomed to failure as "mildew that had accumulated over a period of centuries", which "could not be scraped off so easily" (Chughtai 351). Though she refuses to be an object of patriarchal transaction in marriage and deconstructs the discursive construct of the middle class 'good' woman by marrying the man of her choice, Shaman is far from achieving marital bliss. The narrative ends with the pregnant Shaman all alone looking forward to an uncertain future that waits ahead her:

How well lit the isolation of her quarters, how incredulous she was today, but so happy! She had never felt so weak and so courageous, so anxious and so content. And how beautiful the world appeared, how precious life was! Poor Ronnie, alone and empty handed! She felt sorry for his

impoverishment, just as she would feel sorry for a wretched beggar shivering in the cold outside her palace window. ‘You thief’, she scolded the newly enriched being, ‘You also robbed a heartless tyrant’ (Chughtai 369).

Thus Shaman’s search for an alternative order comes to an end with an open resolution highlighting the unconventionality of both the text and its protagonist. Though constructed in the style of bildungsroman, *The Crooked Line* is not a narrative of teleological progress of its protagonist from birth to adulthood, rather it records Shaman’s confused meandering through the path of life: “floating...without sails, without oars, without a guide” (Chughtai 299). Shaman’s modernity lays in this unexpectedness as Chughtai herself remarks: “Contradiction marks existence...Countless questions are wrestling with each other in my mind. Resolving them, disrupting them, and resolving them again, this is life” (Kumar 207).

Thus by highlighting the complex struggles associated with women’s experiences of modernity in the first few decades of the twentieth century, the paper highlights how Chughtai, in *The Crooked Line*, deconstructs the dominant discourse of the ‘home’ as a historical place and presents the lived experiences of the domestic sphere to be marked by repression, exclusion, segregation, and pain. It also emphasizes that modernity, in the context of gender, signifies the attempts made by women to transgress the boundaries of domesticity and be fully human, to live through their bodies as well as their minds. However any attempt to articulate modernity other than the prescribed one for them by the reformist-patriarchy results in struggle, confusion, pain, and isolation.

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The Daughters of Kali and their ‘Untold Story’: Reckoning the Absence of the Female Thugs in Colonial Thug Narratives

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The issue dealt with in this article suggested itself to me while pursuing a recently published work on Thuggee. The June issue of the *Rupkatha* journal contained an article on Thuggee entitled “Positioning Kali in Thuggee Tradition” by Rasheda Parveen and Akshaya K. Rath. Trying to account for the centrality of Kali-worship in Thug lore, the authors come to the conclusion that the devotion towards the mother goddess afforded the Thugs a way to economize their libidinal urges. According to these authors, this was a necessity because the Thugs had to spend several months at a stretch on the road away from home and normal conjugal relations. “In renouncing sexual life, thus in the relative absence of women figures, they fortify their passion towards the mother-figure”, writes Parveen and Rath. (Parveen and Rath 167 – 168) What is to be noted is that these authors conceptualize Thuggee as an “all-male system of banditry” where the Thugs formed “all-male” groups. (Parveen and Rath 167) Such understanding does not appear wholly unsupported because colonial discourse often constructed the Thugs as forming “homosocial groups”, to use the words of these authors again. (Parveen and Rath 160) Sleeman himself repeatedly used the word ‘fraternity’ to characterize the Thugs: the full title of his magnum opus *Ramaseeana* being *Ramaseeana, or A Vocabulary of the Peculiar Language Used by the Thugs, with an Introduction and Appendix, Descriptive of the System Pursued by that Fraternity and of the Measures which have been Adopted by the Supreme Government of India for its Suppression*. Though the word *fraternity* may carry a gender neutral connotation today, one can never forget that its root lies in the Latin word *frater* meaning ‘brother’. Thus the description of the Thugs as a ‘fraternity of criminals’ appears to evoke an understanding of Thuggee as a gender-specific activity. Yet, the truth remains that the Thugs themselves professed admitting female Thugs in their gangs. None other than Sleeman had accepted the existence of female Thugs as truth. Given this fact, it appears strange that the female Thugs had failed to find a place in colonial fiction on Thuggee. Since such tales always thrived on sensationalism, their abandonment of the female Thugs (and the titillating possibilities they offered) appear all the more unusual and striking. Therefore, my objective in this article is to shed some light on these forgotten ‘daughters of Kali’ and to suggest some possible reasons for their absence from colonial literature on Thuggee. In the process, I would

also focus on the representation, and eroticization, of Indian women in two of the most important colonial novels on Thuggee—Philip Meadows Taylor’s *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) and John Master’s *The Deceivers* (1952). It is my contention that the particular requirements of the genre, to which these two novels belonged to, necessitated the exclusion of the female Thugs from their fictional worlds. Finally, pursuing the line of enquiry taken up by Parveen and Rath, I would like to imagine how the inclusion of the female Thugs in popular British discourse on Thuggee would have affected colonial representation of Thuggee as a Kali-worshipping cult. There is hardly any doubt that the inclusion of the female Thugs in the Thug canon would have forced the British to conceptualise Thuggee in a significantly different way.

There is little consensus among contemporary scholars regarding the existence of Thuggee as a tangible phenomenon. There are some who look upon Thuggee as being simply a British invention with little or no grounding in historical events. Amal Chatterjee, for instance, believes that the British justified “their domination of the subcontinent by creating a variety of ‘others’ and ‘facts’ about those others ... during the period of civilizing administrative conquest if the Thugs been ‘unreal’, some other ‘police’ matter would have been ‘found’.” (Chatterjee 5) There are again others who do not share such extreme scepticism. In his article “The Deconstructed Stranglers: A Reassessment of Thuggee” Kim A. Wagner criticizes the approach of scholars like Parama Roy, Amal Chatterjee, and Máirení Fhlathúin who apply the techniques and methodologies of literary criticism to understand the subject. According to Wagner, these scholars, who “share the assumption that Thuggee was basically a constructed colonial stereotype”, reach an erroneous conclusion through application of unsuitable methodology. (Wagner, “The Deconstructed Stranglers”, 935) He persuasively argues that the transfer of the methodology of literary criticism to historical studies is problematic, because “problem arises when a purely literary textual analysis is uncritically applied to historical material and the result is supposed to be a valid statement of a historical discourse.” (Wagner, “The Deconstructed Stranglers”, 936) Wagner puts the question succinctly, “if thuggee was a colonial construction then who were the four thousand men convicted of the crime?” (Wagner, “The Deconstructed Strangler”, 936) To believe that the British randomly (and falsely) punished that many number of men merely to satisfy their whim would be absurd. Elsewhere Wagner warns, “The discursive construction of Thuggee did not occur in a vacuum of self-referential texts, but in a specific historical context and as the result of specific events and ideas.” (Wagner, *Thugge*, 7) Along with Wagner, there are other scholars like Martin Van Woerkens, Mike Dash and others who accept the historical reality of Thuggee but do not credit the British representations of Thuggee in their entirety. These scholars insist on the examination of primary materials like official depositions of the Thugs, besides the secondary printed sources, in order to unravel the reality

behind Thuggee. Without denying the justness of this approach, I, however, focus entirely on textual representations of Thuggee in this article. It is not my aim to prove whether the female Thugs historically existed or not. It is sufficient that some of the British authorities believed in their existence and wrote about them. Therefore, following the approach of Kate Teltscher, the texts that I choose “are neither evaluated on their supposed accuracy, nor assessed on the extent of knowledge of India which they display.” (Teltscher 5) They are chosen simply because they represent, or fail to represent, the female Thugs. Whether such representations correspond to reality or not is beyond the concern of the present paper.

While much has been written on Thuggee, the topic continues to baffle laity and experts alike. The following section briefly describes Thuggee, recounting its history from the earliest times. It then focuses on the female Thugs, about whom we know very little. In his book *Thug or a Million Murders* Major Sleeman’s grandson Colonel James L. Sleeman wrote, “No movement is complete without the presence of women, and, a hundred years ago, Thuggee proved no exception to the rule.” (Sleeman 108) Accepting this statement as our starting point, we launch our enquiry on the female Thugs.

The Daughters of Kali: Thuggee and Women

The English word *thug*, which *Oxford Advanced Learner* defines as “a violent person, especially a criminal”, (Oxford Advanced Learner 1602) has been borrowed from modern Indian vernacular (Hindi, Bengali, Marathi) *thag* (meaning ‘swindler’), which in turn came from the Sanskrit root *stha* (meaning ‘to cover or to conceal’). In Indian languages *thag* carries the general meaning of swindler, cheater or deceiver, and is closer in connotation to Sanskrit *dhurta* (‘crafty’). To the British colonizers, however, ‘Thug’ denoted a special class of criminals who prayed to the Hindu Goddess Kali and preyed upon travellers on the road. In this sense, the Thugs were synonymous with the *Phansigars* who dispatched their victims with a noose (*phansi*= ‘noose’). These criminals were also known by various local names such as *phanseeo* in Gujarat, *tanticalleru* in Karnataka and *aritulucar* in Tamil Nadu. (Woerkens 118) The Thugs, as the British believed, always operated in gangs. Their main targets were travellers, whom they robbed of their lives and properties. The preferred weapon of the Thugs was the handkerchief or the *rumal* with which they strangled their victims. However, they were also known to use more conventional weapons like swords, daggers, and poisons occasionally. What apparently distinguished the Thugs from other predatory bands of criminals like marauders and dacoits was that they robbed their victims only after killing them first. As Sherwood observes, “Phansigars never commit robbery unaccompanied by murder, their practice being first to strangle and then to rifle their victims.” (Quoted in Bruce 14) Unlike the dacoits, they did not openly attack their victims even if the victims were numerically weaker than the Thugs. Rather, they

chose to befriend their victims before assassinating them treacherously. It is for this reason that they were called the Thugs or ‘the deceivers’. As the British saw them, the Thugs were efficiently organized. Each person in a gang was allocated his or her specific duties. There were *jemadars* or leaders, *sothas* or inveiglers, *bhurtotes* or stranglers, and *bojhas* or people who concealed the corpses by burying them. The Thugs were even believed to have their own secret language called *Ramasee* which allowed them to communicate with each other undetected.¹

It is incontestable that the British colonizers were the ones to bring Thuggee into limelight. In particular, credit must be given to one man, Colonel (later Major) William Henry Sleeman, for launching a crusade against Thuggee. But though Sleeman claimed for himself the entire credit for the ‘discovery’ of Thuggee, modern scholars have shown that this was not true. Sleeman was certainly not the first British writer to write about Thuggee. The first scholarly exposition on Thuggee in English is entitled “Of the Murderers called Phansigars”. It was written by Dr Richard C. Sherwood and was published in the *Madras Literary Gazette* in 1819; long before Sleeman’s anonymous letter to the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* appeared on 3 October 1830. Nor was Sleeman the first English officer to apprehend the Thugs. Martine Van Woerkens informs that, “The first major blow to the Thugs occurred in 1829: Major Borthwick captured seventy eight of them in Bundelkhand; thirty-nine were condemned to death by Colonel Stewards, resident in charge of Indore.” (Woerkens 4) Based on the above information, Wagner comes to the conclusion that Sleeman was simply an opportunist who goaded the government to launch a massive operation against Thuggee only to advance his own career. (Wagner, “Introduction” in *Stranglers and Bandits*, 23) Thuggee, however, was known to the Indians long before the British had set their foot in the subcontinent. The earliest historical reference to the Thugs can be found in the works of Ziauddin Barani (1285 – 1357) who informs that the ruler of Delhi Jalal-ud-din-Khalji had captured several Thugs in 1290. In a misguided act of clemency, the Sultan did not execute them and deported them to Lakhnauti (modern Gauda in West Bengal). In 1672 the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb issued a decree or *farman* permitting the execution of convicted *phansigars*. The earliest European reference to Thuggee can be found in the work of the Frenchman Jean de Thévenot, a work to which we will have occasion to return to.² Indologists like Wilhelm Halbfass and Paul Dundas have further drawn our attention to the references to Thugs in ancient Hindu and Jain texts. It is not clear whether the word *thug*, as used in these texts, refers to ordinary swindlers or to veteran murderers. But both Halbfass and Dundas write about an ancient Indian group of murderers called the *Samsāramocaka*-s who killed human beings on religious ground, apparently to free them from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. As murderers motivated by religious zeal, Halbfass and Dundas consider them to be the forerunners of the Thugs. (Dundas 281 – 284) From the facts mentioned above, it becomes evident

that the Thugs were not mere ‘colonial constructions’ or figments of British imagination. However, Woerkens, Wagner and several other contemporary scholars believe that though the British did not ‘invent’ the Thugs, they were guilty of exaggeration, distortion, and misrepresentation. Accordingly, Thuggee, as it appears in colonial texts, must be recognized as being partly a product of colonial discourse.

What makes an objective understanding of Thuggee difficult is the dearth of Indian writings on the topic. Apart from the few Indian sources mentioned above, almost everything that we know about Thuggee came to us from the British. The British accounts are, however, prejudiced. They present only a one-sided view of the phenomenon. In the absence of reliable objective evidences, one must rely partly on his imagination to fill up the gaps in British accounts and reconstruct the (hi)story of Thuggee. The matter relating to the female Thugs provides a case in point.

The existence of the Female Thugs is a topic that has been largely glossed over. The earliest known reference to the female Thugs appears in Jean de Thévenot’s travelogue *Voyages de Mr De Thévenot contenant la relation de l’Indostan, des nouveaux Mongols & des autres Peuples & Pays des Indes* (1684). It was translated later in English as *The Travels of M. de Thévenot into the Levant* in 1687. The relevant portion is as follows:

They [the Thugs] have another cunning trick also to catch Travellers with: They send out a handsome Woman upon the road, who with her Hair dishevelled, seems to be all in Tears, sighing and complaining of some misfortune which she pretends has befallen her: Now as she takes the same way that the Traveller goes, he easily falls into Conversation with her, and finding her beautiful, offers her his assistance, which she accepts; but he hath no sooner taken her up behind him on his Horse-back, but she throws the snare about his Neck and strangles him, or at least stuns him, until the Robbers (who lie hid) come running to her assistance and compleat (sic) what she hath begun. (Thévenot, in *Stranglers and Bandits*, 61 – 62)

It is obvious that Thévenot was merely reporting hearsay rather than narrating a first-hand account. But his account of the female Thugs could not have been entirely imaginary. Almost a hundred and fifty years after, the existence of the female Thugs was once again affirmed in Sleeman’s *Ramaseeana* (1836). In this work Sleeman provides a list of the slangs used by the Thugs. One of the terms he records is *Baroonee*, which means “An old and venerable Thug woman, who is much respected by the fraternity.” (Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, 79) *Baroonee* is the feminine of *Baroo*, which

means a respectable Thug. Woerkens guesses that *Baroo* has been probably derived from the Hindi word *bara*, meaning ‘great’ or ‘important’. (Woerkens 146) In *Ramaseeana*, the word *Baroonee* carries a note where Sleeman declares that he had heard about only one female Thug – the wife of a certain Thug-leader named Bukhtawur. This woman used to accompany her husband on thug-expeditions, assisting him in strangling his victims. On one occasion she was reported to have strangled a man all by herself, when the latter had overpowered her husband. Sleeman also mentions hearing about another Deccani woman who “kept herself a small gang of Thugs”. (Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, 79 – 80) Though these two were the only women Thugs described in *Ramaseeana*, Sleeman account left open the possibility of the existence of other female Thugs.

With the discovery of Megpunnaism, further proof of the existence of female Thugs was unearthed. Megpunnaism, as Sleeman defines it, was the “system of murdering indigent and helpless parents for the sake of their children.” (Sleeman, *A Report on the System*, 4) The children were either sold to affluent families or to gypsies and establishments of prostitutes. The Megpunnas were believed to have been similar to the Thugs in some basic ways. Both preyed upon travellers, worshipped Kali and had a secret language. In fact, Megpunnaism was seen as an offshoot of Thuggee itself; Lieutenant Mills, Sleeman’s associate who ‘discovered’ the system, opines that the Megpunnas “found this system more lucrative than that of murdering travellers in good circumstances.” (Sleeman, *A Report on the System*, 5) However, the basic difference between Thuggee and Megpunnaism is that the Megpunnas murdered travellers not necessarily for their wealth but for their children. Another difference was that the Megpunnas ‘invariably’ took their families to expeditions. The female members were employed as inveiglers “to win the confidence of the emigrant families.” (Sleeman, *A Report on the System*, 5) Sleeman himself interrogated a number of female Megpunna Thugs. One of them, Moosmt alias Umree alias Khumba, admitted being a former Thug *jemadarnee*. She further informed that “my husband had a gang of forty or fifty men and women, whom I always accompanied on Thuggee.” (Sleeman, *A Report on the System*, 20) She thus acknowledges that other women were also admitted in Thug gangs. However, Moosmt denies being a strangler herself, claiming that “the female Thugs are only employed in taking charge of the children of the murdered people.” (Sleeman, *A Report on the System*, 20) Other women Megpunnas interrogated by Sleeman were Radha and Rookmunee, both wives of Roopla *jemadar*, and Oodakoor the wife of Salga Bunjarrah. None of them admitted being a strangler herself, though all acknowledged accompanying their husbands on Thug expeditions. The testimony of these female Thugs must, however, be taken with a pinch of salt. After all, in apprehending the Thugs, the British had to rely a lot on the testimony of the approvers. The Thug approvers betrayed their former comrades in

exchange of mitigation of their sentences. But as the British themselves realized, they were not always reliable. It was common for such approvers to misinform the British to suit their own purposes. At times, they falsely incriminated innocents to settle old scores. In a letter to the British Commissioner at Mysore, the writer M. L. Birch cautions that some approvers incriminated innocents out of malice. He cites the particular case of Khadir Sahib who falsely tried to implicate Hoossein Sahib and Mohammed Sahib against whom he nourished some “grudge” or “grounds of complaint”. Given the untrustworthiness of Thug accounts, it is quite probable that the female Thugs deliberately lied to the British authorities to protect themselves from severe punishments. The male Thugs would have naturally corroborated their statements to prevent their womenfolk from receiving death sentence or deportation for life. After all, the Thugs were known to have been very tender to their womenfolk, as Sleeman records in *Ramaseeana*. (Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, 147-148)

Besides Sleeman, Edward Thornton in his *Illustrations of the History and the Practices of the Thugs* (1837) also accepts the existence of the female Thugs as truth. However, Thornton merely repeats Sleeman, providing no new information in this regard. In the twentieth century, Sleeman’s grandson James L. Sleeman dedicated one chapter (chapter XI entitled “Women and Thuggee”) in his book to the female Thugs. Colonel Sleeman frequently misquotes his grandfather, but adds nothing new to existing knowledge. It appears that by this time the women Thugs vanished from public memory. In John Masters’ novel *The Deceivers* (1952) a Thug character Piroo mentions that “the women can’t actually be Deceivers of course...” (Masters n.p.) This, as our data shows, is obviously a mistake. Interestingly, no pictorial or photographic representation of the female Thugs seems to exist. None, for instance, can be found in Woerkens’ classic work. The famous photograph taken by Bourne and Shepherd of the Thugs in captivity (ca. 1870), which appear in books and articles every now and then, features only bearded male Thugs. (Woerkens 268 – 269) Given that women Thugs like the Megpunnas were also apprehended by the British, their absence from photographs and pictures of that time appears unusual. It is true that a few contemporary scholars have acknowledged the existence of the female Thugs. But there is hardly any work dedicated solely to them. This indicates their marginalization in the Thug canon even in recent times.

Women in Thuggee Literature

The displacement of the female Thugs from the Thug canon, and the consequent stereotyping of Thuggee as a gender-specific activity, owed much to the literary representations of Thuggee in colonial novels. The impact of these works on Western public imagination can never be undermined. Without these, Thuggee would have remained confined in official documents. Amal Chatterjee calls Philip Meadows Taylor “the publicist” for Thuggee. (Chatterjee 126) That he certainly was. It was Taylor’s

bestseller *Confessions of a Thug*, rather than Sleeman's scholarly but little known *Ramaseeana*, that captivated public imagination in the Victorian period. In his autobiography *The Story of My Life* (1877), Taylor boasts that Queen Victoria became so interested in this book that she read it in the manuscript. (Taylor, *The Story of My Life*, 106) Judging by the enormous success of this novel, this may not have been improbable at all. Today, the novel is recognized as "the quintessential novel on thuggee" – to quote Wagner. (Wagner, *Stranglers and Bandits*, 36) The novel became so popular that it has been translated in several languages: in French as *Memoires d'un Thug* (1942) by Lucienne Escoube, in Kannada as *Papanivedane* (1964) by V. G. Krishnamurti, and in Marathi as *Thagaci Jabani* (1974) by Vaman Sivram Apte. (Finkelstein 22) There is a Bengali translation as well - the recently published *Thagir Atmakatha* (2015) by Debjyoti Bhattacharyya. John Master's novel *The Deceivers* did not attain the same level of popularity. But there is a film adaptation of this novel directed by Nicholas Meyer, in which famous Indian actors like Shashi Kapoor, Saeed Jaffrey and Neena Gupta appeared in leading roles. The data given above indicate the level of popularity of these works. It is surely not absurd to claim that these works continue to shape the popular understanding of Thuggee. The exclusion of the female Thugs from these works, therefore, ensured their gradual expulsion from the Thug canon.

But why did these novelists abstain from depicting the female Thugs? Was this an unconscious omission or a deliberate strategy? These questions need answers. It is my contention that the exclusion of the female Thugs from colonial literature on Thuggee was not accidental but a carefully thought out strategy of these colonial writers. After all, these novels were potboilers in nature that thrived on sensationalism. It is unusual for the writers of such novels to give up any opportunity of titillating their readers. And what would have proven more salacious than the portrayal of the female Thugs in action? Of course, John Masters (1914 – 1983), being a twentieth century writer, might have remained ignorant about the existence of the female Thugs. But that would not have been the case with Captain Philip Meadows Taylor (1808 – 1876), who was not only a contemporary but had also taken active part in British operations against Thuggee. More than that, in *Confessions of a Thug* one of Ameer Ali's intended victim, a Sahoukar, tells him, "I have heard too that they [the Thugs] have handsome women with them who pretend distress on the roads, and decoy travellers who may have soft hearts, to help them". This, one may instantly recognize, is directly borrowed from Thévenot. That Taylor definitely knew about the female Thugs is evident from this passage. Yet, he dismisses this account as being untrue; as is manifested by Ameer Ali's dismissive reaction to the Sahoukar's story who "laughed inwardly at the Sahoukar's idea of Thugs". (Taylor, *Confessions of a Thug*, 145) The question, why he did so, needs to be answered. One may further note that both

the novels of Taylor and Masters eroticize Indian women to titillate the Western readers. Therefore, their effacement of the female Thugs could not have been accidental.

In order to understand why Taylor and Masters expelled the female Thugs from their fictional worlds, one needs to examine their portrayal of Indian women. Our readings of these novels make it clear that both these novels capitalize on the vulnerability of the Indian women to justify British colonization of India. In these works one comes across a variation of the 'rescue script', where, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identified, 'white men save brown women from brown men'. (Spivak 93) In Masters' novel the protagonist William Savage learns about the Thugs while trying to rescue the wife of Gopal the Thug from becoming *sati*. By associating *sati* with Thuggee, Masters indicates that British suppression of these evils vindicated their rule in India. Thuggee and Sati are also mentioned in the same breath by Taylor in his article "State of Thuggee in India" where he reflects, "The abolition of Suttee (sic) and the abolition of Thuggee in India, are acts which will receive the applause of all true philanthropists and of posterity, when the brilliant victories of the British career are forgotten ..." (Taylor, "State of Thuggee", 285) Of course, justification of British rule is more indirect in *Confessions of a Thug* where British presence is only minimal. But even here Indian women are portrayed as victims who require rescue. The Thug-protagonist Ameer Ali causes the deaths of several women travellers during the course of his murderous career. One of them is his long-lost sister, whom he fails to recognize and kills with his own hands! Another woman is Shurfun, the lover of Amir who divines his secret identity and therefore had to be silenced. Further, there are Indian women in this novel who are raped and killed by the 'Pindharee' (Pindari) hordes. The Pindaris were Maratha auxiliary horsemen who plundered much of the central India before being exterminated by the British. By providing lurid details of the atrocities committed by the Pindaris on the Indian women, Taylor tries to justify the extermination of the Pindaris. He seems to suggest that the British had done the Indians a service by destroying menaces like the Pindaris and the Thugs who preyed upon the ordinary people, including women. Naturally, in novels like these one cannot expect to find the presence of the female Thugs who would have jeopardized the 'rescue script' by their very presence. After all, if the women themselves appeared as victimizers instead of victims, who would the British rescue? Or how could the British condemn Pindari or Thug violence against Indian women, if they themselves were guilty of committing violence on a section of native women? It is probable that considerations such as these prevented the colonial novelists from representing the female Thugs in their novels.

There is another factor that may have contributed to the expulsion of the female Thugs from colonial literature on Thuggee. It is interesting to note that both Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* and John Masters' *The Deceivers* belong to the genre known

as 'imperial gothic'. Patrick Brantlinger, who identified this genre, names three main themes of the imperial gothic. These are – atavism or the white man turning native, the threat of demonic or barbaric invasion from the East, and the degradation of the white man who loses all his powers of action in his confrontation with the colony. (Brantlinger 230) The first two tropes occur in *The Deceivers* while the second one can be found in *Confessions of a Thug*. In Taylor's novel Thuggee endangers the order imposed by British government on India. The novel tells the story of the infamous Thug Ameer Ali, who narrates the tale of his murderous career to a listening Sahib. While the Thugs never attack the British directly, their operations threaten the stability that the colonial government sought to establish. Martine Van Woerkens further compares Ameer Ali to gothic villains like Bluebeard, Frankenstein monster and Dracula. (Woerkens 245-260) Like these characters, he remains on the fringe of society, endangering social order. Master's novel is more pronouncedly an imperial gothic, where Kali, as the goddess of the Thugs, threatens the English rule. In this novel William Savage the Collector of the fictional Madhya District impersonates an Indian Thug in order to gather information about the Thugs. The novel is in fact pseudo-Biblical in tone - depicting the confrontation between the Christian God and the Hindu Goddess. Hussein, William's Thug-associate, says to him at one point, "Your God is a foreigner and does not know Kali's strength, and will fight better against her than ours, who do, and are frightened." (Masters n.p.) He begs William to give him a cross which he believes would protect him from the lure of Kali. As the story shows, this proves true. Further in course of the novel, William reflects, "Where was God, the true Christian God? Had God arranged it, so loathing Kali, that even to know her was to know Death, become Death?" (Masters n.p.) Clearly Masters echoes the Old Testament narrative of the confrontation between Jehovah and the false heathen Gods. Unlike Taylor's novel where Kali is just a 'heathen' idol, Kali in *The Deceivers* is an actual malevolent presence whom Masters often eroticizes. There are references to Kali's "naked, appalling beauty", her "lascivious tongue" and "liquid mouth", and to her "naked teats sticking out". (Masters n.p.) Further, in a ritual mocking the Eucharist through implication, Yasin, the Thug-guroo, offers consecrated sugar and water to William and the Thugs, stating, "Take, eat, this is the sweetness of Kali. You are hers and she is yours." (Masters n.p.) Clearly Kali is depicted as a rival of Christ or Jehovah, a devilish presence in every sense of the word. Further, the novel depicts the degeneration of William who impersonates his look alike Gopal the Thug. Though he promises his wife Mary that he will never take the life of any human while pretending to be a Thug, William quickly succumbs to the lure of Kali. He murders Gopal, the Rajah of Padampur and a sepoy in succession with the terrible *rumal*. His skill at leadership convinces the Thugs to accept him as their leader or *jemadar*. He becomes famous as the beloved of Kali or 'Gopal Kali-Pyara'. It is only through strong exertion of will that William finally escapes the lure of his terrible profession. Thus in this novel the white man

turns native, endangering his sanity and soul in the process. Both these novels thus merit classification as Imperial Gothics. It is well recognized that such gothic novels typically victimizes women to provide titillation to the readers. The same is done in these novels. However, the presence of the female Thugs would have understandably prevented these writers from casting Indian women in the typical roles of victims. Hence, they are kept outside the fictional worlds of these novels.

Conclusion

Our examination of colonial fiction on Thuggee thus induces us to believe that the exclusion of the female Thugs from such writings were not accidental but premeditated. Behind their absence we trace the operations of colonial ideology that demanded the specific representation of Indian women as vulnerable subjects. As indicated, this justified the continuation of British rule in the subcontinent. It remains to be seen whether the gradual effacement of the female Thugs, from not only the novels but also the entire British discourse on Thuggee, had anything to do with colonial ideology. As modern historians like Woerkens and Wagner believe, Thuggee was indeed a reality which was misrepresented by the British to suit their own purpose. Comparison of colonial narratives on Thuggee with pre-colonial narratives indicates that while the worship of Kali by the Thugs was once regarded as a matter of little or no importance, it became the defining feature of Thuggee with the passage of time. Even in 1989 Leon F. Fannin in her paper “Thuggee and Professional Criminality” called the Thugs “a secret religious-criminal group”, thereby showing the persistence of the stereotype. (Fannin 34) With Hinduism having three thirty million deities, it is natural that a presiding deity could be found for any human activity. For instance, Kartikeya, the general of the Gods, is also considered the patron deity of thieves. Kali likewise is worshipped by all who traffic in human blood including soldiers, robbers and Thugs. There is also nothing peculiar in Kali being worshipped by Muslim miscreants, because years of co-existence naturally fostered such syncretism in the subcontinent. The British, however, overemphasized the element of Kali worship in Thuggee. It allowed them to interpret Thuggee as something more than mere criminal activity. The representation of Thuggee as religiously motivated crime allowed the British to sweepingly condemn Hindu religion. (See Fhlathúin for details, 35-36) It further sanctioned their colonial mission of civilizing the natives in spite of themselves. The presence of the female Thugs, however, made it problematic to represent Thuggee as a religiously motivated crime. The British believed that Indian religions like Hinduism and Islam typically suppressed and victimized women. Then how could women worship Kali side by side with the men? Or how could they do without it, if Kali-worship was the real motivating force behind Thuggee? Of course, female worshippers of Kali are well known in the subcontinent. In Bhavabhuti’s Sanskrit drama *Malatimadhava* one comes across the *tantrika* Kapalkundala and her master Aghoraghanta who try to sacrifice the heroine Malati to

Goddess Chamunda or Kali to gain supernatural powers. The existence of Kapalkundala in this drama proves that women worshippers of Kali were not uncommon. But the British, despite having the work translated, could not accept such a possibility. Interestingly, one of the terms Sleeman record in his *Ramaseeana* is *eetuk*, synonymous to *eentab*. *Eetuk* refers to the contamination from menstruating women, the wife or daughter of a Thug. Sleeman informs, “No man can enter on an expedition while they are in that state, or for a certain number of days after; and if the leader’s wife or daughter should be in that state none of his party can go.” (Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, 91) The term seems to indicate that like any other religious activity Thuggee required its practitioners to keep away from certain taboos. But what if the leader was a woman, a *jemadarni* rather than a *jemadar*? Or, what happened when a female Thug entered her menstrual phase during an expedition? Sleeman does not provide an answer. His recording the term, however, indicates that he considered Thuggee a gender specific activity, despite having evidence to the contrary. Following Sleeman, the latter writers did not involve themselves with the question but conveniently forgot the female Thugs. It is evident that the inclusion of the female Thugs in the Thug canon would have required reconceptualization of both Thuggee and Hinduism, an exercise that The British were not willing to undertake.

The absence of the female Thugs from Thug narratives thus shows how even criminality could be gendered for ideological purposes. Interestingly, the daughters of Kali still remains dominated, finding no mention in official narratives. However, I would like to end with a note of hope. The upcoming movie *The Thugs of Hindostan* promises to present before us the female Thugs, with the heroine in one of their roles. Will it at last do justice to the dominated daughters of Kali by bringing them back to the Thug canon? Time alone will answer.

Notes

1. The description of Thuggee given here has been summarized from Martine Van Woerkens’ classic account of Thuggee in her *The Strangled Travelers*.
2. Extracts from relevant portions of these works can be found in Wagner’s anthology *Stranglers and Bandits*.

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Debt to the National Archives of India, New Delhi is hereby acknowledged.

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Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* : A Feminist Perspective

Jyotsna

Bapsi Sidhwa was born and brought up in United India. In this age of globalization, it is really very difficult to categorize some writers; Bapsi Sidhwa is one of them. She likes herself to be described as a Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsee woman. Her fiction deals with both the pre-and postcolonial period of the Indian Sub-Continent. What is most remarkable about her work is her dual perspective which is based on both the Pakistani and the Parsee point of view. She speaks both for the Pakistani and the marginalized Parsee community. She picks some significant incidents from her own life or from the lives of other people and fleshes them out to create a larger reality of fiction. Her writing career began at the age of twenty-six. She has many novels to her credit. It was her third novel *Ice-Candy-Man or Cracking India* that earned Bapsi Sidhwa international acclaim and acceptance as one of the most promising English novelists from South Asia, placing her from among the leading lights like Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai and R.K.Narayan.

In *Cracking India*, the child protagonist, Lenny, is reminiscent of child Sidhwa. Like Lenny, Sidhwa too suffered from polio as a child due to which she was not sent to school and had frequent visits to hospital. Like the protagonist, Lenny, Sidhwa at the time of partition was an eight-year-old girl living in Lahore. Recalling the nightmarish experience of those days, Sidhwa tells Feroza Jussawalla:

When I was a child living in Lahore at the time of partition, my maiden name was Bhandara, which sounded like a Hindu name. After most of the riots were over, a gang of looters came in carts into our house thinking it is an abandoned house. They were quite shocked to see us and my mother and everybody there. At that time our Muslim cook came and said, what do you damn people think you are doing? "This is a Parsee household", and they said, "We thought it was a Hindu household" and they went away. I decided to write a story about partition because this scene was vivid in my mind. (200)

The novelists of Indian Sub-Continent have carved a niche for themselves and

have won accolades- prestigious awards and prizes-making significant contribution to literature of the world. Bapsi Sidhwa belongs to India, Pakistan and the United States simultaneously but she likes herself to be called as a Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsee woman. She picks up some significant incidents from her own or from the lives of other people. She is unique because of her boisterous humour, caustic wit, a sense of fair play and shrewd observations of human behaviour. Sidhwa has a distinctive Pakistani, yet Parsee ethos in her writings but above all a unique individual voice. Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*, examines the inexorable logic of partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. First published in 1988 in London, this novel is set in pre-partition India in Lahore. It is the second novel on partition by a woman author, the first being Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Both these women writers share similar perspectives on the calamities of Pakistan. The novel skillfully recreates the ethos of partition as a historical event through the view point of a precocious eight-year-old Parsee girl Lenny. The novel captures the effects of communal turmoil that follows partition through the innocent eyes of Lenny, the child narrator of the novel, much more like her creator, polio-ridden, precocious and a keen observer of the happenings around. Partition figures in all her novels set in the Indian Sub- Continent. The lameness of the narrator-protagonist becomes suggestive of the handicap a woman creative writer feels. She decides to wield the pen. Because writing being an intellectual exercise, which is considered a male bastion, outside the routine of a woman's submissive domesticity. Her recuperation symbolizes the over-coming of the constraint on the intellectual activity of writing by Bapsi Sidhwa. Col. Bharucha, being the spokesman of the Parsee community in Lahore cautions his community against an active part in the politics of the day. He advises his people to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare to safeguard their interest.

Cracking India is a saga of female suppression and marginalization. It projects realistically women's plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society. It exposes how men establish their masculine power and hence fulfill their desires by brutally assaulting women. While as on the other hand, it poignantly depicts how women endure the pain and humiliation enacted upon them. Bapsi Sidhwa is among the important signatures in Pakistani literary world. Being a Parsi, she is aware of her roots, past and the Parsi community. *Cracking India* is her major novel which introduces a child-narrator Lenny who narrates the events in the wake of Partition of India. Sidhwa's concern for her Parsi community, place of women in Pakistani society, human struggle for survival and dignity of man are major themes in her novels. In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa presents her Parsi community in a dilemma over the issue of support. Partition is imminent and the question of loyalty haunts the Parsi psyche. *Cracking India*, offers a significant treatment of a gynocentric view of reality in which the feminine psyche and experiences are presented with a unique insight. The women characters of the novel are aware

and confident of their individuality and cannot be easily subjugated. Lenny, her Ayah Shanta, her mother and Godmother affirm their autonomous selfhood and exhibit capability of assuming new roles and responsibilities. They also expose the patriarchal biases present in the contemporary social perceptions. *Cracking India* commands attention and admiration on several counts. It is the second novel by a woman writer (the first being *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain), dealing with the theme of Partition of India, but it is the first by a non-partisan writer as Bapsi Sidhwa, being a Parsee, does not belong to either of the two communities which perpetrated mayhem on each other. Therefore, it is likely to be a more neutral and objective account of the traumatic event of Partition which caused divisiveness, disharmony, mutual suspicion, hardening and then turning into hostility of feelings of friendliness and good-neighborliness and the eventual holocaust. While Attia Hosain does not delve deep into the gory details of the massacres, Sidhwa depicts the events overtaking the Partition in their naked cruelty and ruthlessness. It is a bold attempt on the part of a woman writer to take up a theme which is different from the traditional issues the women writers generally assesses the issues of romantic involvements and the sentimental stuff. Also it is no mean achievement on Sidhwa's part to depict the process of sexual maturation of a young girl while living in a country like Pakistan where the measure of freedom for women is considerably less than it exists in India. But above all, the novel becomes a significant testament of a gynocentric view of reality in which the feminine psyche and experiences are presented with a unique freshness and aplomb. The novelist demonstrates how the gynocentric perspective determines the narrative strategy, resulting in the production of a truly feminist text. Bapsi Sidhwa turns the female protagonists into the moral centre, while most of the male characters either remain apathetic or indulge in destructive violence and disintegrative action. The analysis of *Cracking India* reveals that the female characters pulsate with a will and life of their own. While these characters are unselfconscious of the biological essentialism of their sex, they cut loose the constraints imposed by the gender which is a social construct (and can therefore be deconstructed), and which has come into existence through centuries of biased, motivated and calculated orchestration of the aggressive patriarchal postulates. In a "patriarchal social set up, masculinity is associated with superiority whereas 'femininity is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion and domination, femininity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation. *Cracking India*, though ostensibly a hero-oriented novel, subtly but effectively subverts the ingrained elements of patriarchy, privileging female will, choice, strength along with the feminine qualities of compassion and motherhood.

An essential difference between a feminist text and a male discourse is that in the latter it is the male who is invested with the qualities of heroism, sacrifice, justice

and action while generally the female protagonists remain the recipients of the male bounty and chivalry, in a feminist text, it is the woman who “performs” and controls and promotes the action by her active involvement and concern and in the process it is she who acquires the attributes of heroism and glory. In *Cracking India*, the narrator’s relationship with her cousin (he remains cousin throughout the novel, without the specific identity of a name) upholds the principle of equality (or even superiority of woman), as she does not allow him to manipulate her sexually and he remains a drooling figure, adoring her for her vivaciousness. In no way does Lenny’s lameness become a source of self-pity or a constricting force on her psyche. She remains assertive, at times even aggressive and holds her own when it comes to the crunch. And who is the formative influence on Lenny? Her Ayah, Shanta. The eighteen-year-old Hindu Ayah of Lenny has a seductive appearance and attracts many admirers. When Ayah takes Lenny in the evenings to the park, her several admirers mill around her. Among them are Falletities Hotel cook, the government house gardener, a head-and body Masseur, the Zoo attendant Sher Singh and Ice-Candy-Man, all vying for her attentions and her favours. Ayah has such stunning looks that she draws covetous glances from every one. Beggars, holy men, hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes and ogle at her. Even the English men are not able to resist her magnetic charm. They are people of different faiths—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs—yet they live together amicably in a spirit of oneness.

The Ayah is a flame of sensuousness and female vitality around which the male moths hover constantly and hanker for the sexual warmth she radiates. She acts like the queen bee that controls the actions and emotions of her male admirers. Of these Masseur and Ice-Candy-Man are Ayah’s most favourites. Lenny is continuously haunted by her nightmares. Her younger brother, a handsome and fair Adi is also under the care of Ayah, Shanta. Ice-Candy-Man, one of the admirers of Ayah, is the titular hero of the novel who turns out to be an anti-hero in the end. Lenny observes the transition of the Ice-Candy-Man through the roles of the Ice-cream vendor, bird-seller, cosmic connector to Allah via telephone, and pimp. The measure of Ayah’s power is seen when she objects to the political discussion among her multi-religious admirers as she fears discord the Ice-Candy-Man defers to her wish and says, “It’s just a discussion among friends . . . such talk helps clear the air . . . but for your sake, we won’t bring it up again.” Epitomizing the strength of the femininity of a female, she infuses in Lenny the ideas of independence and choice. Flirtatious and coquettish, the Ayah is fully aware and confident of herself as an individual, who cannot be taken advantage of. At the same time, she is fiercely loyal to the interests of the family she serves and is extremely protective of Lenny, as a mother would be, besides being emotionally attached to her. She suffers during the Partition riots, she is abducted by the cronies of the Ice-Candy-Man, ravished and raped by the hoodlums, kept as the

Ice-Candy-Man's mistress for a few months and then is forced to become the Ice-Candy-Man's bride. Her name is changed from Shanta to Mumtaz and she is kept at a *kotha* (brothel) even after her marriage. During the interregnum between her abduction and marriage, she, in the words of Godmother, is "used like a sewer" by "drunks, pedlars, sahibs and cut-throats," (250) with the connivance of the Ice-Candy-Man. But as soon as the opportunity presents itself, she seizes her freedom and gets away from the man she does not love. She is firm and decisive. "I want to go to my family.... I will not live with him," (261) she tells Godmother. And this decision is in spite of the Ice-Candy-Man's love for her who weeps snivels and pleads humbly with the Godmother to let her remain with him as he has married the Ayah. He receives a thrashing at the hands of the burly Sikh Guard at the Recovered Women's Camp gate, where Ayah is admitted and turns into a *mad faqir* (insane ascetic), going to the extent of following the Ayah to Amritsar. Lenny's mother conforms to the traditional image of a fidel, faithful and serving wife who seems to be capable only of humouring things out of her husband. She submits to the moods of the man she is wedded to, tolerating in the process, the conventional hegemony given to the male of the species among human beings. And here it appears, the writer could not muster courage enough to invest her (Lenny's mother) with qualities different from those she does, considering the social ethos in the country of her habitat. But the feminist in Sidhwa cuts a caper, and achieves her end in a subtle and complex way. In *Cracking India*, it is Lenny's mother and Lenny's aunt who play the sterling humanitarian and heroic role of fighting for the lives and property of Hindus. Clearing herself of Lenny's accusation that she has been helping in the communal conflagration, she says: "we were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away. . . . And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your ayah, to their families across the border." (242). Thus, it is the two women who undertake the risky job of saving lives in danger and the fact acquires significance in the fictional scheme of things.

Towering high among the women protagonists is the vibrant figure of Lenny's Godmother (one of her aunts) whose name is Rodabai. Godmother's personality sparkles with razor-sharp wit, her indefatigable stamina, her boundless love for Lenny, and her social commitment. Her sense of humour, her deer-like agility, in spite of her old age, and her power to mould, modify and order not only individuals but even the system, when she so desires, earn her respect and admiration of people around her. But besides these qualities she is endowed with profound understanding of human existence and her wisdom is revealed when she consoles the Ayah, in the aftermath of what has been done to her: "That was fated, daughter. It can't be undone. But it can be forgiven. . . . Worse tilings are forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness . . . all fade impartially ... to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That is the way of life." (262) The most glorious example

of her self-confidence, authoritativeness, capacity to handle crisis-situations deftly is provided by her dealing with the Ice-Candy-Man and the rescue of the Ayah the effects after she has been kidnapped and is kept at a *kotha*. The Ice-Candy-Man is propped with the power of the pimp-community, consisting of lawless elements. Endowed with a glib tongue, he is not an easy person to deal with. Affected at last by Godmother's stony silence, Ice-Candy-Man lowers his eyes. His voice divested of oratory, he says,

"I am her slave, *Baijee*. I worship her. She can come to no harm with me."

"No harm?" Godmother asks in a deceptively cool voice—and arching her back like a scorpion does to its tail, she closes in for the kill. "You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and *goondas* and say she has come to no harm?"(248)

Ice-Candy-Man's head jolts back as if it's been struck.

"Is that why you had her lifted off—let hundreds of eyes probe her—so that you could marry her? You would have your own mother carried off if it suited you! You are a shameless badmash! *Nimakharam*! Faithless! ". (248) Godmother's undaunted visit to the disreputable "Hira Mandi" (the area of *kothas*) and the rescue of the Ayah, once she is convinced that the Ayah is being kept by force against her will, are commendable indeed. Godmother concentrates in her character what the feminists feel is very important for a woman to realize her individuality: the feeling of "self-worth."

Sidhwa has given a very realistic and transparent picture of carnage during Hindu-Muslim riots in 1947. The novel mirrors men becoming adversary on the basis of their religion and also represents the changing political scenario of the country. Emotional turmoil, individual weakness, barbarities of communal riots and the brutalities inflicted on women amidst this iconoclastic ruthlessness and communal frenzy have been very realistically projected by the novelist. The whole story has been narrated by the female protagonist Lenny who relates the horrors of violence and her personal observations and reactions. The protagonist not only observes but also analyses men's lascivious and degrading attention towards women, voraciousness of male sexual desires, women's plight as they are reduced to the status of sexual objects, and relates the peculiar disadvantages, social and civil, to which they are subjected.

The novel closes with Ayah's departure for Amritsar followed by a harmless Ice-Candy-Man. Ayah is restored to her family in Amritsar. Beaten and defeated, Ice-Candy-Man follows her across the Wagah border to Amritsar with no glimmer of hope of ever being reunited with her. He seems to have lost interest in the world. The novel raises an issue that is always of serious concern for both the countries. Sidhwa's treatment of the subject is so fresh and refreshing that this dark and sordid tale of partition turns into a powerful truth-telling narrative. It is a powerful account of independence which includes a cast of characters—Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Parsee and Sikh. Sidhwa's portrayal of men as perpetrators of dreadful outrage, and women as sufferers and saviors confirmed to her feminine perspective on partition and independence.

Cracking India, thus, becomes a feminist text in the true sense of the term, successfully attempting to bring to the centre-stage the female protagonists. These protagonists, while on the one hand, come alive on account of their realistic presentation, on the other, they serve as the means of consciousness-raising among the female segment of society.

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Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*: A Session for Disempowering 'Woman'

Paramita Bandyopadhyay

Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* written in Marathi in 1967 and subsequently translated into English foregrounds the representation of a spirited, self-willed and independent woman caught up in a diabolic game played out by a number of male chauvinists. The play made its appearance in the 1960s when the world was witnessing the rising tide of the second wave of feminism that got a major fillip from the spread of feminist literature drawing a special inspiration from the philosopher-writer Simone-de-Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex*.

Tendulkar, although not a self-proclaimed feminist, expresses in many of his plays a deep concern and even anguish for women victimized and marginalized in a patriarchal set-up. They, according to the man-made construct, belong to the category of 'second gender', the first being men. This has been termed "interior colonization" by Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics*. This 'colonization' of women lingers on even after the end of political colonization in large parts of the world including India.

The crux of the play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is the politics of male power that poses a serious threat to a woman struggling to attain a self-reliant autonomous position. Leela Benare, a 34-year old school teacher is also an artiste of the Bombay based amateur theatrical group, "The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association". The group is scheduled to stage a play at a Maharashtra village on the subject of the mock trial of the American President Johnson for producing atomic weapons. Only, it is subsequently revealed that the male members of the theatrical group have a secret design to hold a mock trial of Leela Benare before staging the mock court to try President Johnson. This shows the agenda of repression pursued by the gender-discriminating patriarchy on female folk.

Benare, the first entrant to the venue of the dramatic performance, meets Samant, a local villager, and engages herself in conversation with him. She finds in him a responsive listener to whom she can open up. Benare, who has a genuine sense of difference in the face of male dominance, makes some critical remarks about her co-performers who are yet to arrive. She refers to the chairman of the organization Mr. Kashikar as "Mr. Prime objective"-, (59) and his homemaker wife Mrs. Kashikar as a woman totally subservient to her husband. As Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar have no

children of their own, they have adopted Balu Rokde, a student whom, Benare comments, they have turned into their slave. Benare also describes Sukhatme, another actor in the group, as “an Expert on the Law”(59) who is ironically enough a briefless lawyer. Ponkshe, another artiste, who works as a clerk in the central telegraphic office is, according to Benare, an intermediate failed scientist. All this information about some of her theatre-group colleagues is a good enough assessment of the patriarchy-oriented characters who impinge strongly on the female sensibility of Benare. The group also includes Karnik, a performer in experimental theatre.

The progress of the dramatic action reveals the fact that Benare’s characteristic vivacity and success in various fields of co-curricular activities have given cause for the jealousy of her male co-artistes. They, as the representatives of patriarchy, stand opposed to the position of a woman who also happens to be an achiever. The instinct of jealousy in Benare’s colleagues and her “one bit of slander” (58) prompt the male members of the theatre group to hatch a conspiracy against her. They decide that before the scheduled performance, all the artistes can profitably utilize the time by holding an imaginary trial in the form of a play. The planned mock trial is directed against Benare by making her the accused in it. The motivated malignity of Benare’s male colleagues finds a ruthless manifestation in pushing her to the margins. As the critic Arundhati Banerjee has rightly noted:

...Tendulkar used the hackneyed courtroom drama to build a serious theatre just as Ibsen had adopted romantic drama as a receptacle for his indictments of society. *Shantata* is a play that combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society.(Banerjee,x)

At the outset of the mock trial, Benare is stunned to hear from Ponkshe that she has been “arrested on suspicion of a crime of an extremely grave nature” (74). Mr. Kashikar adds that she has been accused of the crime of infanticide under Section No. 302 of the Indian Penal code. During the trial, Benare vehemently denies this charge of infanticide and says, “I plead not guilty. I couldn’t even kill a common cockroach...How could I kill a newborn child?” (79). The role of the conspirators and the problem faced by Benare bring into sharp focus the gender-centric order of the social structure. The American critic Alice Kessler-Harris has rightly observed:

In revealing something of how power was ordered and perpetuated, gender became crucial to comprehending social structure and social change. The more we understood of how gender operated, the more we would understand about hierarchies of domination as they functioned to regulate and control. (Kessler-Harris,827-828)

In Tendulkar's play, the professionally undistinguished and culturally depraved co-actors of Benare exhibit their narrowness, their egotism and total lack of decency and decorum. Their earlier declaration of the mock trial being a game meant for joy and fun turns out to be a mischievous game plan to oppress Benare. The structure of oppression created by male power puts her in the dock to try her. We get here a striking example of the operation of the politics of sex as noted and indicated by Kate Millett in her famous book *Sexual Politics* (1970). As the gender division which is a socio-cultural construct privileges a man over a woman, the mock trial sequence in the play *Silence! The Court is in Session* clearly shows the patriarchal ideology of domination in all its ramifications. The mischievously motivated co-artistes level the charge of moral misconduct against Benare. In his allegation, Ponshe says, "...she is unmarried" (81) before adding, "...she runs after men too much" (81). Rokde tells the mock court that once he saw Benare at Professor Damle's house in the evening. At this point, Benare however strongly asserts, "There's no need at all to drag my private life into this. I can visit whom I like. Damle wasn't eating me up" (87). This is a clear reiteration of her expression of individual freedom voiced in her earlier assertion, "My life is my own..." (58).

As she is reeling from the shock of emotional blows dealt to her by her male adversaries, the feeling of marginalization begins to get stronger in her. The unsolicited male intrusion into her private life means the denial of any exclusive space to her, implying that she has no room of her own (the concept codified by Virginia Woolf in her book, *A Room of One's Own*). However, any acceptance through passive internalization of a delegated status of being "the other" is an absolute impossibility for a woman of Benare's sensibility. In fact, the concept of "alterity" fittingly conforms to her special sensibility. "Alterity" which means "difference" as opposed to negative "other" denotes the possession of a separate identity endowed with a quality of individual privacy. Indeed, it is Benare's conviction about her "alterity" that makes it possible for her to assert that she can visit whom she likes.

Samant, a substitute witness, has been deluded into believing that the mock trial is a game. On this understanding, he takes his task in a lighter vein, and so in his deposition in the mock court, he reads a portion from a popular novel that has an incidental similarity with the episode at Damle's house on one evening when he had refused to take any responsibility for the pregnancy of Benare in order to protect his reputation. The proceedings in the mock court make Benare understand that her co-artistes have "ganged up" (93) against her. Articulating her resistance, Benare says, "What can you do to me? Just try!" (94). The tone of challenge which resounds through her words can well be interpreted as a subterranean determination to deconstruct the norms of patriarchal domination. Benare subsequently attempts to make a quick exit, an action that signals her determination to dismiss and violate the

restrictions that the male dominated society seeks to impose on women, but she soon discovers that the door is locked from the outside. Hence, she finds herself trapped physically and symbolically as well.

Nevertheless, even as Benare continues to be plagued by the innuendoes and insinuations levelled against her, she in the next sequence refuses to give any answers to the questions put to her. Mrs. Kashikar, who is a woman jealous of Benare, tells the mock court that the unmarried woman Benare had chosen not to marry since “That’s what happens these days when you get everything without marrying” (99). Mrs. Kashikar claims that Benare used to visit Professor Damle at his residence after every performance.

During the proceedings of the mock trial, Rokde says that one night Benare had “...held my—my hand” (102). This action is interpreted by Sukhatme as “... an outrage in a lonely spot, on a boy like Rokde,...” (103). Ponkshe, in his own deposition, tells the mock court that Benare had once given him the proposal to marry her. It is also highlighted in the play that even on her first meeting with Samant, Benare had indirectly enquired about his marital status. All these attempts, it is suggested, indicated a desire on Benare’s part to give her unborn baby the signature of legitimacy demanded by society.

Mr. Kashikar even goes to the extent of informing the court that Nana Saheb Shinde, who heads the education society that runs the school where Benare works, has decided to dismiss her from the service because of her immoral act. In his role as the mock court judge, Mr. Kashikar allows the accused only ten seconds to make her submission. Benare decides to break her silence to demonstrate that though the agencies of patriarchy have tried to make her a marginalized subaltern, she can nevertheless speak. The eminent feminist theoretician Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak has raised the stormy question about whether the subaltern can speak in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” One of the implications of this question is that the so-called subaltern’s voice evokes no cognizable response from the society where the “dominant ideology” of patriarchy holds sway.

Benare gives expression to her mental turmoil through a monologue in which she says, “Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself. Life is a betrayal. Life is a fraud” (116). She bewails and insists, “For what sin are they robbing me of my job, my only comfort? My private life is my own business. I’ll decide what to do with myself;...” (117). In this utterance, Benare expresses her strong feelings against a male-dominated school administration bent on tormenting and punishing her by dismissing her from the job. As she decides to combat this situation by speaking out her mind, she openly describes all those who seek to humiliate her as “...the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces— how ferocious they look! Their lips

are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires”(117).

Distressed and dismayed, Benare reveals that when she was only fourteen years old, she had been a victim of sexual molestation committed by her maternal uncle. He had praised her blooming beauty and had involved her in a professedly romantic relationship. She had insisted on marriage, but all persons close to her including her mother had opposed this. The “brave man”(117) had left her, and she had “...felt like smashing his face in public and spitting on it!”(117). Subsequently, Benare had attempted to commit suicide, but as she says, “But I didn’t die. My body didn’t die!”(118). More recently, she fell in love with a man of “unusual intellect”(118). However, her love for him took the form of “worship”(118), and she confesses, “I offered up my body on the altar of my worship”(118). In return, the intellectual man betrayed her. He made her pregnant but disowned his responsibility. It may be noted here that the two words “body” and “worship” used by Benare are significant inasmuch as they are associated with the female self in both a physical and a metaphysical sense. While “worship” suggests respect, reverence as well as a transcendental devotion to a higher entity, the female “body” is the material locus of man’s exploitation. In the case of Benare, her admiration for the higher intellectual abilities of a man ironically led to her commodification as an object of the lust of this man.

Mr. Kashikar who acts as the judge of the mock trial tells Benare magisterially, “The crimes you have committed are most terrible” (118). Then he pronounces his verdict by imposing on Benare his injunction, “...you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed” (119). Protesting sharply against this verdict, the unvanquishable Benare declares in the clearest terms, “No! No! No!—I won’t let you do it—I won’t let it happen—I won’t let it happen!” (119). It is clear that it is the “mother” in her that empowers her to make this strong assertion. But there is a further dimension to this as this order of the mock court about aborting the foetus instances the falsification of the charge of infanticide that had been levelled against Benare at the outset of the trial.

The play is focused on man’s privilege in the subjection of a woman to his libidinous designs followed by his act of leaving her in the lurch. The unfoldment of the plot of the play indicates how the institution of patriarchy not only promotes hypocrisy and double standards, but also denies a woman the right to maintain her self-entity. To indulge in promiscuity is claimed as the prerogative of a man. To become a victim to his sexual wantonness is considered to be a grievous sin in a woman.

It is important to appreciate too that *Silence! The Court is in Session* embodies a strong recognition of the fact that the tentacles of the patriarchal vision entangle women equally as men. This is shown through the portrayal of Mrs. Kashikar in the play as a stereotypical, traditional Indian woman who is obedient to her husband. As a

female individual who has internalized the values of the patriarchal society and therefore has self-blinded herself to the possibility of women's resistance and empowerment, Mrs. Kashikar treats Benare as the target of her jealousy as the latter is a confident and free-spirited woman, the kind of person she never can become. Together with the male co-artistes of the theatre group who represent the patriarchal order that continually opposes and resists any move by a woman to fight for her freedom or even to assert her individuality, the Kashikars are committed to an agenda of disempowering women. The real face of the so-called respectable, educated middle-class Indians is stripped of its mask of gentility and civilization in Tendulkar's play. The "Silence" stressed in the title of the play indeed has a double implication, indicating as it does the male-dominated society's silencing of brave women like Benare who would be heard if only permitted to break their silence or to articulate their own histories, thoughts and values, and the fact that the play ultimately demonstrates that women like Benare can never be totally silenced. This is because Benare's words are heard not only by the group of actors who perform the metatheatrical mock-trial but by all the audiences within theatres before whom the play is performed, and beyond them by the readers of the play. Despite the silencing of the woman protagonist in the action-in-performance play, we are thus left with the impression that the silencing at the conclusion of the mock-trial is not the real conclusion, and that this will not be the end of Benare's journey. In fact, since the play does not have a definite closure, we are left with the feeling that woman's empowerment is a continuing process.

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Restructuring Gender Identity through Reversal of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Study of Kavita Sinha's *Pourush*

Dipak Giri

Out of Gramscian concept of hegemony grounding on “the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally” (Gramsci 80), ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’ appeared as a theory in the 1980s. Contrary to Gramscian concept of hegemony which is a cultural construct, encompassing almost all humanity in general, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’ is a gender construct and its area of study is specific and limited which chiefly concentrates on masculine hierarchy of power and position over feminine gender. As a term, it was first used by Connell in his book *Masculinities* and since then it has earned a special area of study in terms of gender relation between the masculine and the feminine genders. Connell defines ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’ as:

The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimation of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell's *Masculinities* 77)

Connell's ‘configuration of gender practice’ is limited to the configuration of male gender practice and he states nowhere about the configuration of gender practice related to feminine gender and in his defence he says,

There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men. (Connell's *Gender and Power*, 183)

Instead of relating hegemony to feminine gender, Connell used ‘Emphasised Femininity’ which serves as a counterpart, or subordinated other, to hegemonic masculinity, ‘performed especially to men’ (Connell's *Gender and Power*, 188). Connell's concept of ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’, being constructed in the interest of masculine gender over feminine gender, gave rise to debates and controversies among many. Among such debaters and controversialists, Schippers is one who, contrary to Connell's uneven treatment of hegemony that privileges male over female, suggests hegemonic masculinity along with a relational concept of hegemonic femininity. Rewording and elaborating Connell's definition, Schipper defines ‘Hegemonic Femininity’:

Hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Schipper, 94)

Neither Connell in his concept of 'Emphasised Femininity' nor Schipper in her concept of 'Hegemonic Femininity' pondered over the gender equality. Schipper just added another chapter in Connell's concept of 'Hegemonic Masculinity' with 'Hegemonic Femininity'. Still femininity has to go a long run to meet her most desired goal of equality with masculinity. Against 'Hegemonic Masculinity', many writers came forward holding the pen. Still the way, Kavita Sinha did it, is an achievement in itself. Kavita Sinha's novel *Pourush* (Manliness, 1984) can be examined through the lens of counter-hegemonic masculinity. The novel is the story of a widow Sarala and a trans-woman, Sakhisona. Together they accomplish the counter-hegemonic theme embedded within the very narrative. The story shows how Sarala and Sakhisona, women of compliance and submissiveness in their early life, underwent a radical change in their later life when they protest their male counterparts, becoming free from any sort of inhibition and inertness.

A great move towards the close of the twentieth century was that many women writers from across the country lifted up women's issues in their writings which brought about a remarkable change in the social milieu. A contemporary of poet Kamala Das and Amrita Pritam, Kavita Sinha also belonged to that time of social change and awakening when the conventional image of womanhood in Indian society coming down the ages based on the idea that it is a social construct and gets its finality, not by the physical anatomy but by the process of social conditioning, was on the way of being slowly blurred out in Indian literature and in its place, a completely transformed image of new and modern woman was on its way to becoming its main area of concern. Befitting with the spirit of the time, Kavita Sinha upheld the cause of womanhood in her writings. In her many beautiful creations, she tried to lead her women characters to a place of distinctiveness through their gradual changes and transformation. Apart from higher idealized image of 'Devi' and lower imperfect image of 'Dasi', her write-ups depict modern women as nothing more than characters who are very true to their beings. In words of Dibyandu Palit, "...she was the first rebel and feminist poet in Modern Bengali poetry..." (29).

Kavita Sinha's novel, *Pourush*, centering on its two chief characters- Sarala, a widow and Sakhisona, a trans-woman, brings under scrutiny the identical question, gender roles as defined by the society and the power play behind gender and identity. Through the character portrayal of Sarala, Kavita Sinha shows how a middle class woman, self-complacent with her domestic role of traditional housewife, is forced to

come out in the public sphere after the unexpected death of her husband and take up a job in the same office where her husband had been employed. Sarala, as her name implies, being a woman of simple and elegant, has to pass through troubles and complexities of life when she is subjected to compulsion in the form of public job which she takes up unwillingly. Being a widow, she undergoes abuses and humiliations both in-laws' house and the place where she works. In spite of being the bread earner of the family, Sarala feels unwanted in her in-laws' house. Even her brother treats her as an outsider. She struggles for social and familial space. In her working place she faces the vulgar remarks of her colleagues who often look at her with preying eyes and even throw slighting remarks. There are many instances in the narrative which prove how female body becomes the object of male desire in working places. One such example is Sarala's salary hike. When Sarala is called to her Boss's chamber to be announced by her employer that her salary is increased, it is misinterpreted by her male colleagues who are waiting outside and when Sarala comes out from the Boss's chamber, they look at Sarala with dubious eyes and display signs of eroticism.

When she is walking across the hall, it seems, everyone is looking fixedly at her shoulder as if the senior boss has put the impression of his dyed hand on her shoulders. When she enters the room, it seems to her, Makhan, Rabi are not hiding their *bidis* that way they used to do. While putting gum in the envelopes, she stealthily notices, Rabi and other are gossiping loudly. There is no longer that low voice of respect. Kashi is scratching pulling his *dhoti* up to his knee. (Sinha 82)

Here Kavita Sinha successfully presents the painful reality of working places where women are sexually harassed and discriminated by their male colleagues. This is the picture of almost all working places. There is hardly any working place where women get her due respect.

When life goes against the flow, the common tendency that is seen among human beings is that they create their own world of fantasy to survive against the hardships of life, as testified by M. Esther in *The Way of All Women*:

I have known many individuals who have built up an elaborate fantasy island or castle to which they retire when life is dull or difficult. Here they often spend endless time and energy constructing in fantasy a world more to their liking than the humdrum one to which they find it so hard to adapt. They rebuild the world nearer to the Heart's desire. (qtd. in Mandal, 87).

Being abused and humiliated by hegemonic masculinity, life becomes too bearable for Sarala to bear that she tries to escape from it by her own way. She seeks solace conversing with her dead husband. Her imaginative conversation with her late husband allows us to visit many unexplored regions of her brain which struggle to find outlet but hardly find anyone to express. We come to know from this conversation about her toils she has to undergo as a working woman, her troubles she has to suffer as a widow woman and many more pains and sufferings which are not brought forth in the surface of the story.

Through Sarala, Kavita Sinha presents not only the plights and sufferings of widows but also gives lesson how to challenge the adversary if arises in one's life . Sarala overcomes all the hurdles in her life. Instead of succumbing to societal pressures and hardships, she becomes conscious of her worth as a woman, and as an individual, and transforms herself from being to becoming. By and by Sarala adapts herself with her new assigned role of a working woman that fate has forced her to accept. Slowly she learns how to become a public figure. In order to adjust herself among public, things unimaginable during her former life of a traditional housewife like how to be travelled alone in public conveyance, how marketing to be done, how things to be bargained with the sellers, how tea to be drunk from road side stalls are now learnt and practiced by her. True to the old dictum, "Practice makes perfect", Sarala transforms herself into a perfect public figure, one who is courageous and bold enough and resigns her former self which has confined her identity within the four walls of domesticity. She is now no longer a meek and submissive woman. She is perfected well through her practical experiences. In due course, she appears as a woman of self-reliance and assertiveness, one who knows how to be get promoted and reach high salary through toil and hardworking. She decides to rent a room in Kolkata and stay there alone as she wishes no longer to be treated unwanted and extra burden by her in-laws' family and her brother. Instead of becoming other, she gives importance to self. In the later part of the novel, she appears as a resolute and strong-willed woman and tries to prove herself.

Along with Sarala, a widow woman, Kavita Sinha's *Pourush* also presents the plights and sufferings of transgender through Sakhisona, a trans-woman. The male-dominated society treats trans-genders with least amount of respect and a large amount of disgust. The conservative patriarchal society is not ready to accept the different characteristic trends of their sexuality. 'Hijra', 'Brihannala', 'Launda', 'Khoja', as people love to call the transgenders, are regarded as somewhat "strange, detestable creature, perhaps criminal and definitely subhuman" (Bandyopadhyay viii) by the society. They are literally the social outcast. The society fails to understand that despite the outwardly slight different disposition; inwardly they are the same as the other human beings. They are destined to suffer the humiliations and the cruel jokes of the

society. Hence, they have to struggle in every walk of their life. The story of Sakhisona unravels the distressed life of *hijra* communities. Here, through the character of Sakhisona, Kavita Sinha has detailed how a person of third sex is forcefully taken away from his or her family, has to undergo the painful process of castration and forced to live a life away from the mainstream world. The description of castration is horrifying: "After that Pingla dragged her and made her sit on the heap of ashes... When Hijra opened the cover of the lower part of her body, she fearfully observed that Pingla was rushing towards her like a murderer with a sharp-edged bamboo stick...slowly they cut the stick in between and put it on Sakhisona's private part so that it could not move.... Manali rushed towards her with a razor...lowering her head, she saw that her inactive, sheared part recoiled and besmeared with blood and ashes was lying on the ground." (Sinha 190)

Sakhisona, with her invincible will power and intense desire to establish her true self as a woman, denies the preordained role of prostitution and entertaining the people to which *hijras* are usually attached. The story recounts Sakhisona's attempt to come to the mainstream life. In the conventional Hindu culture, the presence of *hijra* is acceptable in two occasions – marriage and birth. Ironically these two are the very same privilege denied to them by man and nature. She flees from the clutches of the *hijra* community, starts struggling for a new life, and buys a sugarcane-juice preparing machine. In all these activities, she has got Lakshman as her partner. Sakhisona starts dreaming of having a home and a family with Lakshman. But in the course of the narrative, Sakhisona enters into confrontation with Sumati, a betel leaf seller for acquiring the space for their shop, a struggle for existence. That quarrel puts Sakhisona face to face with the basic lacuna she has. When Sakhisona urges Lakshman to teach Sumati a lesson, in a fit of anger, Lakshman shouts at Sakhisona and says that she cannot be called even a 'Magi', a low Bengali term, meaning 'prostitute'. Sakhisona's dream shatters to ashes when she comes to learn that Lakshman has started a secret relation with Sumati who has been impregnated for the second time (however, not by Lakshman). Sakhisona realizes how barren she is, how futile her attempt of having a domestic life is, how she is an 'other' in this hetero-normative world. She gradually accepts her defeat, gives her sugarcane juice extracting machine away to Lakshman and Sumati and returns back to the *hijra* community. But she takes the oath of preaching other trans-women for attempting more and more to the mainstream so that the mainstream people cannot reject them anymore. Through Sakhisona, Kavita Sinha very realistically depicts the sufferings, humiliations and degradations along with joy, love and strength of a trans-woman who also wishes to be the part of main stream society.

Beneath my colourful exterior lies a curled up, bruised
individual that yearns for freedom –freedom to live life on

her own terms and freedom to come across as the person she is. Acceptance is what I seek. (Bandyopadhyay viii)

Kavita Sinha's *Pourush* throws light on the gender stereotype, gender inequity, gender-based discrimination, the clash between convention and modernity etc. in Indian society. The narrative fetches out the painful reality that both widow and trans-woman are still devalued and derogated in male value structure. Adversely affected by gender bias and discrimination, they are still leading a marginalized life, far from being recognition as a fully independent being. Gender discrimination has stigmatized both the life of women and trans-women. Both Sarala and Sakhisona become victims of such male dominated value structure. They are dominated by age-old ideologies formed by patriarchal society, according to which women are the desired objects of man, often distant and enigmatic, and not the subject of (not the one who experiences) passion. They, however, go against the age old masculine culture and tradition which creates a vast rift in such a way as it seems unbridgeable as regards the division of role between male and female. Both Sarala and Sakhisona create their own domain of feminist culture violating traditional man-made culture and social code. They truly pave the new path for the generation to come. Through their transitional role from being repressive to expressive, they undergo a radical change. Their transformation gives them escapade from desired objects to desiring subject. Coming to know about their true self and identity, they no longer remains submissive to injustices unjustly imposed on them by the value structure of male dominated society. Like phoenix, their old self burns to ashes and they are reborn into a new rebellious woman who wants an equal footing with man instead of being flown along the current of male dominated value-structure. In the value-structure of male-dominated tradition, familial and societal maladjustments lead women to inner fragmentation and thereby forcing them to bear all kinds of injustices and ill-treatments which most women accept as their lot and very few struggle to come into their own self. Only through protest and rebellion, women can establish their full power and autonomy over the value-structure formed and maintained by male dominated society. Sarala and Sakhisona, through their transformative role, open a new vista to women giving a lesson of how to struggle against male domination. The narrative highlights that evaluating a person on gender basis is unfair, one must judge an individual based on the capability. Sarala and Sakhisona in Kavita Sinha's *Pourush* come out from the shadowy life of female sub-ordination in order to welcome the new brighter world where there is no uneven treatment on the basis of gender discrimination. They are the harbinger of new hope and energy with which women of coming generation are to be driven to reversal of gender binary by which male gender is privileged and female gender remains underprivileged all through their life. Through reversal role of Sarala and Sakhisona in Kavita Sinha's *Pourush* in terms of gender and sexuality, Kavita Sinha forces us to think and reconsider the

institutions of love, marriage and relationship again from rationalistic point of view instead of in what shape they actually exist.

Through their changing role of new womanhood, both Sarala and Sakhisona in Kavita Sinha's *Pourush* neither correspond to Connell's concept of Emphasised Femininity nor Schippers' concept of Hegemonic Femininity. In both concepts, the status of woman is neglected and sidelined from the mainstream of society. The main idea of both Connell and Schippers is based on traditional outlook that woman can never transcend man and thus equality with man from woman's side is a far-reaching reality. The concept of both Connell and Schippers is biased by typical male centric ideology which always establishes the superiority of man over woman. Showing relationship between hegemonic masculinity and femininity, Charlebois argues, "(T)he relationship between hegemonic masculinity and femininity is not built upon principles of mutual compatibility and equality, but rather on the dominance of masculinity and subordination of femininity." (Charlebois 41) Discussing the difference between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity, Charlebois further states, "Crucially, a salient difference between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity is that men are empowered through embodying hegemonic masculinity, while women are disempowered by embodying hegemonic femininity." (Charlebois 41) In order to resist unequal gender relation, a non-hegemonic form of femininity may become a source of power. For this, Charlebois suggests Messerschmidt's concept of oppositional femininity which "refuses to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination." (Messerschmidt 206) In conformity with Messerschmidt's concept of oppositional femininity, both Sarala and Sakhisona in Kavita Sinha's *Pourush* are non-compliant with hegemonic idea of female subordination. They contest the unequal gender relation based on hegemonic principles of Connell and Schippers and emerge as an embodiment of oppositional femininity.

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Bharati Sarabhai, a Pioneering Indian Playwright

V. Satya Sudha

Women writing in India started as early as the Vedic times, and their literary output is a matter of pride for the country. Among these women writers – quite well known to the British and Indian writers of her times, a patriot, sentimentalist, mystic, philosopher, social activist and a staunch supporter of Gandhianism - is Bharati Sarabhai, who takes the credit of being the first modern Indian woman playwright. She straddles the pre and post-independent times and being born in 1912, into the affluent and patriotic family of Seth Ambalal Sarabhai, was influenced by Gandhiji and Nehru. K.R.Srinivas Iyengar who culled the vast body of Indian English literature acclaims her works and calls her as the most distinguished of women dramatists. She has two plays to her credit - *The Well of the People*, published by Visva Bharati press in 1943 and *Two Women* by Hind Kitabs in 1952. The former is a verse drama with a lone female protagonist, making a poignant plea for a casteless society and the latter is a romantic tragedy which delineates the sentiments and bonds abounding in marital relationship. Foregrounding her plays is a rich addition to the valuable archetypes of the pre-independent literary genres.

The Well of the People (1943)

Bharati Sarabhai draws inspiration from three sources in writing this poetic drama. In her very interesting Preface she says that she had visited the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar which took place from April 1938 to August 1940; she was a volunteer in the village session of the Indian National Congress at Haripura; a few months later a friend drew her attention to the simple story of an old village woman, which had appeared in the *Harijan*, a journal published by the Mahatma. (WP Preface) Coincidentally, the three influences – Haridwar, Haripura and Harijan - the spiritual, social and political concerns are merged into the fine tapestry of this play. Though the theme of the play is social reform, the verse contains the mysticism of Kabir, the philosophy of Tagore, the romanticism of Wordsworth and Keats and the symbolism of T.S.Eliot. Yeatsian influence is seen in the opening line “Things take sudden shape.” (WP) The play progresses as one long poem and does not have Act or Scenic divisions. Sarabhai makes a meticulous and extensive use of the chorus to describe the agony of the protagonist.

The Well of the People tells the story of a very old woman, Rani whose life ambition is to make a pilgrimage to Haridwar and take a dip in the holy Ganga. The play concerns the plight of a loner, without much of her interaction with other characters. Vichitra, Chetan and Sanatan are not characters in the real sense, for they do not have a part to play except serving as observers and commentators. They narrate the tale of the old woman in the first part of the play and in the latter part they take the role of Gandhian workers, and form a part of the chorus. These personae have no action and no conflict.

Rani is a Mythili Brahmin - one of the upper castes in Hindu society. A widow with no progeny, she earns her livelihood weaving khadi. Having no zeal in life, she saves all her hard earned money to go to Benares. But the money not being sufficient she cannot go on the pilgrimage. Meanwhile she grows old, her relatives get distanced, she becomes a cripple and so nobody volunteers to accompany her to Benares. Once the Mahatma visits her village and his message brings about a transformation in her and she decides to build a well in the temple so that all the villagers, including the Harijans, would drink from it. Thus she desires to propagate the Gandhian ideology and vision of a casteless Hindu society. She believes that Gandhi is the true saviour and prophet who can bring salvation to mankind and decides that following the 'Great Soul' is the real pilgrimage that one should endeavour. Finally she hands over seventy silver coins, the amount she had saved, to the Gandhian workers to have the well built.

The Well of the People, a *tour de force* by a woman of the colonial times is not just a clarion call for a casteless society, it is also a veiled plea for the upliftment of women. Isolation of the protagonist has made Bharati Sarabhai choose the genre of verse drama. The play comes in a period when the term 'feminism' was unheard of in the Orient. Yet the images of women presented in the play show the playwright's awareness of the pathetic position of women in India. If untouchability marginalized one section of society, the women were twice removed from the mainstream - once by caste and then by their gender. There was no equality; people only spoke of upliftment of women because of their miserable condition. Villages were full of widows and there was no widow remarriage. They were victims of all kinds of atrocities. Subjugation of women and patriarchal hegemony was the order of the day. Into this scenario comes the old woman, widowed, physically challenged, impoverished, yet with the will of a rock.

Sarabhai has undertaken the bold task of merging diverse themes – social, individual, political, mystical and feminist. Influence of British and Indian poets, especially Tagore, is seen in her versification. The lines vary in length like those in Gitanjali. The symbolic metaphors in some lines excel in craftsmanship like,

I seem to see her, here and here
And here, excite a clear waking trance

That grows fiercer, burning like prismatic glass
Of sleep's dream mirror (WP 12)

The woman is physically weak but her spirit is indefatigable. From despair and disappointment comes social reform which will bring about a new social order. Even in her work she is a Gandhian weaving home spun cloth at her spinning wheel. The chorus pays homage to the great woman,

Mother, you will, you will.
Even now your senses lave,
Fall and wash, splashing along
Within. You will live, live
To see the people's well
Spell in rose golden walls (WP 46)

The leitmotifs in this play are the Himalayas with their imposing presence and the river Ganga a perennial river symbolic of time and life. There are two scenes- the village scene and the Haridwar scene which are in total contrast representing modern British India and the India of the epics.

Bharati Sarabhai has successfully manipulated the utility of the chorus in this play. The chorus first describes the scenes at Haridwar, the thronging men and women there and their activities, the river Ganga and the wilderness seen along its course. In the next verse it describes Mount Rishikesh and the moon rising behind it. When the scene shifts to the workroom it turns into the peasant chorus and later on when Gandhians come it changes into the chorus of workers. The verse play finally ends with the chorus chanting praises of the woman who has fallen and Sarabhai wants the chorus to be unseen and describe Haridwar but in a detached tone.

The symbolic metaphors in some lines excel in craftsmanship like,

I seem to see her, here and here
And here, excite a clear waking trance
That grows more fierce, burning like prismatic glass
Of sleep's dream mirror (WP 12)

and

She was too ill to rise with the last tide
Of pilgrims this summer, which swept them easy
To the far, rare eclipse on Haridwar
But left her sitting on the shore (The Well 15)

Metaphorical, lyrical and philosophical significances beautify the verses,

I may not see Benares: god does not
 Push a sick vessel like this body to
 Each port of earthly pilgrimage, always
 To full and fill, still stop and fill to full.
 But my soul, my free swan, can bring inland
 On a small well, with water pure as Mother Ganga ... (WP 41)

Being a verse play inspired by Gandhian ideology, it has received critical acclaim from critics of Indian Writing in English. Shankar Mokashi Puneekar in his article *Bharati Sarabhai: The Well of the People* analyses how the playwright got the inspiration for the play and its title. He writes, “Bharati Sarabhai’s *The Well of the People* is probably the only articulate work of literary art, giving complete expression to the Gandhian age. It is flawlessly executed with the fullest awareness of all the problems concerning the literary articulation of so powerful an age and employs a sophistication which is its due.” (Puneekar 111) [...] “It was not without reason that Bharati informs us in the Preface that she had long talks with Pandit Nehru after the Haripura Congress and before the Kumbha-Mela at Haradwarae the source of Indian culture. There she stood face to face with the People, a congregation large enough and impersonal enough to be a vision of that source of strength from which the sick, savaged, torn, liberal intellectuals wished to heal their wounds. There she saw, not merely enormous crowds but crowds returning to the source of their national being, crowds drawn to their prime emblems, crowds willing to die for a last dip in the eternal makers of their ecology, the Himalayas and the Ganges.” (Puneekar 222) [...] “The same inevitability has made *The Well of the People* a lyrical, symbolic, dreamy verse-play, enacted within the human consciousness, the conflicts and consolations of an hour in historical time as Bharati witnessed it.” (Puneekar 225,226)

H.H. Anniah Gowda comments on the theme, “The thesis forms the theme of her play, which has echoes of Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*. Eliot’s direct influence is seen in the chorus of three aged women, recalling the chorus of the hysterical women in Eliot’s play” (Gowda 50) and further compares, “The old woman in many ways recalls the countess in Yeats’ play, *The Countess Cathleen*. Like the Countess’s “sacrificial talk” is the old woman’s insistence on visiting a holy place. The ideas are beautiful, but the action gets lost in the mist of verse and sentiment. T.S. Eliot found the language of the play “poetic” and strikingly original.

Bharati Sarabhai says in her Preface to the play, “The old woman, the pilgrim, our main protagonist, casts her shadow long before she actually appears on the scene,

and when she does, she speaks a few bare sentences. I have conceived her as inarticulate, a representative of our “dumb millions,” and hence I have made free use of the chorus to narrate her life indirectly.” (WP 2, 3)

Durgesh B. Ravande praises the efforts of Sarabhai, “Bharathi Sarabhai succeeds in synthesizing the conventional faith with the newly awakened Gandhian social conviction. This amalgamation of religion with social service is very effectively presented in the play. The heroine of the play experiences a new ray of knowledge by accepting the Gandhian path of social service. It is not merely digging a well but routing a new way of social endeavour.[...] It presents successfully a spiritual problem in terms of physical action.” (Ravande 59)

K.R. Srinivas Iyengar terms the play as ‘a poetic pageant.’ He makes a succinct yet splendid comment on the play, “[...]Round the bare bones of this story, Bharati Sarabhai has allowed flesh and blood to flow, and the play has thus become a fabric of symbolism and poetry, memory and melody, and evokes all the heart-aches that are Mother India’s.” (Iyengar 240)

Bharati Sarabhai is a champion of the cause of women and a social reformist attempting to reveal to women their strengths and capabilities, while showing the path to salvation. Influence of Romantic poetry and the Bhagavad Gita, her own fascination for the beauty of nature especially the mountains and rivers are evident throughout the play through the leitmotifs of the Ganga, the moon, Haridwar, and the Himalayas.

Two Women (1952)

Two Women the second of the two plays published by Bharati Sarabhai was produced in 1948 at the Excelsior Theatre, Bombay. Though the play belongs to the post independent times, the idea of the play must have germinated during the colonial times, hence the colonial-Indian flavour, which sets it apart from the modern plays. Similar to *Well of the People* multiple themes merge into the tapestry of *Two Women*. Marital relations, cross cultural dilemma faced by Indians exposed to the western lifestyle and philosophical questions on the mystery of life and death form the major themes of the play. If Gandhi was the inspiration behind *The Well of the People*, Pandit Nehru’s romantic idealism and her own hidden passions must have moved Sarabhai to pen this play.

The lives of the people who inspired, moved or disturbed Sarabhai reflect in the delineation of her characters - her father who had a liking for the European culture, Nehru whom she admired, the discord in the conjugal life of her brother Vikram Sarabhai and the spiritual influence of Shri Anandamayee Ma. Bharati Sarabhai can be visualized as a romanticist, aesthete and philosopher in the play.

The inspiration for the feminist leanings in *Two Women* undoubtedly appears to

be Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, for the parallels one finds between the two plays. Both playwrights have been moved by a feeling of sympathy for women and a passionate belief in human freedom. Like Ibsen, Sarabhai too tries to explore the man-wife relationship and a parallel situation runs in *Two Women*. Ibsen's ideology that, "There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different, in woman. They do not understand each other; but in practical life the woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman but a man." (Ibsen 91-92) The dilemma of Anuradha the protagonist is similar to the predicament of Nora. Both women are housewives caught between family and the dictates of conscience.

The play was reviewed by H. H. Anniah Gowda in his paper, *The English Plays of Bharati Sarabhai* presented in a seminar on Indian Drama held in the University of Mysore in 1971. He says, "Like an Ibsen play *Two Women* is a play about a family, where old tradition is breaking up to make room for the new. Both found expression in the characters. It is Urvashi who understands Anuradha, whose sole ambition is to go to the Himalaya in search of God." (Gowda 55) Prema Nandakumar remarks on the plays, "The poetry of *The Well* is not at all like Yeats'; likewise the prose of *Two Women* has little in common with Eliot's anaemic blank verse.

Two Women is a play in three acts. Act I introduces the major characters Anuradha and Kanak Raya, Urvashi, Anuradha's bosom, childhood friend, Darshan - the younger brother of Anuradha, the secondary characters Lata - Anuradha's daughter, Miss Boulton - an English tutor, Sudha - Kanak Raya's niece and Chandrabai, the maid.

When the play opens, Anuradha, Lata and Darshan are in eager anticipation of the arrival of Urvashi, a dancer. Being confined to the life of a housewife, results in a kind of dissatisfaction in Anuradha and she decides to lead the rest of her life as an ascetic in the Himalayas. Kanak Raya, who loves his wife and desires to travel round the world with her, resents this wish of hers, but Urvashi, who is widowed and inexperienced in the ways of marital life, advises her friend to leave home and find fulfillment in spiritual life. Kanak Raya is worried that Anuradha might go away to her Guruji's hermitage. He tries various ways to prevent her from going. He makes a soul search to find out what had gone wrong and why the discord. Her decision to become an ascetic pains him severely.

Anuradha loves him, worships him and is devoted to him. But his western life style and tastes bring dissatisfaction to her who loves Indian tradition and culture. She is too frightened to express her desires and remains lonely, dumb and apathetic for many years.

Anuradha has a nightmare which upsets her terribly. She is in two minds. She does not want to go away from her husband. The bond of 18 years, and his deep love for her tie her down. Kanak Raya reminds her of the marriage vows but soon realizes

that he is suffering from heart trouble and hands over the responsibility of Anuradha to Chandra Bai. When Anuradha comes to him with the decision of remaining with him, realizing that he is her real Himalaya, he is no more. The play ends with Chandra Bai saying,

He is at peace. And you are going to Himalaya. (TW 121)

Two Women is significant as it stands as a sample of pre-independent Indian English women's writing reflecting the milieu of those times. A multi-layered text with different levels of significance, the first level pictures the dilemma of the couple regarding their connubial relations. The next level symbolizes the characters as personality types reacting to the British influence and the subtext of every dialogue includes a reference to India on the threshold of indecision, caught between tradition and modernity. The play also portrays the finer feelings and sentiments operating between Anuradha and Kanak Raya, the intimate relation between couples and the heart-aches of separation.

The epigraph from Mira bhajan,

With the water of my tears I sprinkled it

And reared the creeper of love. (T W 2)

Suggests the tragedy of Anuradha who thinks that married life has put shackles on the pursuit of her art. She realizes that what she could not attain in 18 years, she cannot, even in the future. Ultimately she is disgusted being doll-wife as the likes of Nora and wants to find a place where she can pursue her art and live according to her tastes. Reviewed from a woman's standpoint the play provides an insight into their joys, sorrows, aspirations and disappointments and explores the feminine psyche in the context of the milieu of those times.

In spite of these external disturbances there is a sustained bond of love between the couple which is the cause of indecision in Anuradha. This forms the major conflict in the play. The resolve of the woman who has decided to break the marital chord is shaken by the pleadings of Kanak Raya. She begins pondering over her decision. The change in Kanak Raya, his passionate love for her, his craving for her presence and his sensuous desires leave her with a wavering mind. For her it is a new birth of the spirit and for him it is also of the body. She is afraid that,

This body may so easily bind me – make my new life freeze...again (TW 73)

when he says, 'How sweet life is, life with you, my sweet bird'. (TW 74)

She is in agony that his ecstasy has become a new net for her, just when she has decided to leave. Her inner conflict is between spirituality and sensuality. There is no strong antagonist in the play and Anuradha's own indecision becomes the source of conflict in the climax. Eventually, Kanak Raya's image acquires a magnanimity which

is in contrast to the earlier image of an aggressive, domineering, self-centered man. In her attempt to delineate Raya as a noble character, Sarabhai sacrifices dramatic tension and plot construction. The bossy, demanding, uncaring Raya turning into a passionate lover transforms the external conflict into an internal one and his death brings about the catastrophe.

Two Women as the title suggests portrays the lives and sensibilities of two women, Anuradha and Urvashi. Anuradha and her daughter Lata are also two women. They resemble each other so much that Urvashi at first cannot make out who is who. Darshan sees two women in Urvashi when he is deeply in love with her – his own Urvashi and Mira Bai.

If the old woman in *The Well of the People* is the dispossessed Mother India, Anuradha is the possessed mother. She is possessed by man from whom she has no release. She is representative of the India which has remained unknown to the Westerner, beautiful, holding on to its age old traditions and remaining untarnished by the English touch. Kanak Raya becoming aware of Anuradha's beauty, is like the Indian realizing India's worth again. Her suffering at her husband's home is similar to India's condition in the hands of the British. The entire play is an extended metaphor with themes of philosophy, East-West conflict, India grappling with the dilemma of traditional versus modern ideologies and the modern woman trying to break free from the shackles of orthodoxy.

The character of Urvashi seems to be born out of the personality of Pandita Ramabai who lived from 1858 to 1922. In addition to her writing she founded the Arya Mahila Sabha in 1881, in Pune, the very first Indian feminist organization. She studied and propagated the issues concerning Indian women and the Hindu traditions. She spoke against the practice of child marriage and the constraints on the lives of child widows. She had got the title of Pandita (mistress of wisdom) from Benares. Through the life of Urvashi Sarabhai supports the cause of widow remarriage and attempts to create the image of an emancipated, scholarly, decisive woman.

Conclusion

A conscious feminist like Ibsen, her womanist images are of sensitivity, inner strength and deep passion. Her women have chosen to swerve off the beaten track and tread a bolder, ground-breaking path - a weak woman who sought the help of others turns out to be one reaching out to the others, by providing a life source; a traditional wife decides to quit the life of a Grihastha; a widow falls in love with a man younger to her and marries him. The women are honest, upright, decisive, yet sensitive, humane, loving, beautiful, romantic, sensuous and sensible, are victims to the vagaries of fate, fighting inner battles, caught in the friction between societal norms, family bonds and personal longings. Only Urvashi stands as a representative of the liberated

woman but Anuradha is stranded in a bicultural dilemma.

Like her own self, her female protagonists – the old woman and Anuradha are also ‘Bhaktas’ who are in quest of the divine. Worldly affairs do not bother them and their vision is towards eternal peace. Both realize in the end that God resides, not in Haridwar or in the Himalaya but in oneself. He is omnipresent and peace can be found in service and love.

Bharati Sarabhai is a playwright whose works represent the mile, milieu and movement of India of the 1940s and 50s; works which bring out the contrast between the pre and post British Indian social set up; works which picture the conflict of India trying to retain the strong roots of ancient culture and also cling on to the modern branches of change. The patriotic fervour and mystic moorings add freshness and lead the modern reader back into almost forgotten themes. A connoisseur of these plays will have glimpses of the ramifications of India of those times.

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‘Parinay’ to ‘Paradhinata’: Critiquing the Trauma of Marital Bondage in Bengali Women’s Writings in the Colonial Period

Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty

I

Marriage in a woman’s life signifies an initiation of a new phase of life. The bond is ritualized through its sacramentality, its presumed inevitability and its reiterated acceptance in the Hindu Brahminical socio-cultural, religious and economic structure. But the possibility of complete overhauling of a woman’s experience in her pre-marital state after coming into the in-laws’ house, of compulsory displacement from the paternal house which come as an unavoidable ‘side-effect’ often turn marriage into a traumatic experience. In Bengali, marriage is known as ‘Parinay’ which connotes a kind of maturation in woman’s life. But the Hindu Brahminical upper caste custom of *balyabibaha* or child-marriage reverses this maturation in a woman’s life to the forceful uprooting of the child-bride from the paternal house. This is further aggravated with the restricted movement of the bride and an expectation of obedience, docility and compliance to the patriarchal discourse in the in-laws’ house. Thus it transforms this ‘parinay’, the marriage to ‘paradhinata’, the bondage. This imposition of the compulsory uprooting and subsequent incarceration in the marital home consequently bring in a series of traumatic experiences in a woman’s life, ranging from psychological trauma, sexual abuse to widowhood. These issues have been refuted in the non-fictional texts of the nineteenth century Bengali women writers like Bamasundari Devi, Kailashbasini Devi, Rasasundari Devi, Nagendrabala Mustafi, Krishnabhabini Devi and more. They position the whole argument within the framework of ‘samsar’, the ritualized domesticity within the fold of Bengali household and provide an alternative optics to attain women’s agency and to move beyond this traumatic experience through their writing. They analyze how the intersectional structure of gender, caste and religion determine and perpetuate this marital trauma in women’s lives. This paper will try to engage with these texts of these women writers to explore the issue of trauma in marriage and their proposed counter-discourse.

Marriage generally indicated child-marriage in upper caste, upper and middle class Hindu family in nineteenth century Bengal. But, certainly, for the child-bride, the sudden uprooting from their paternal home to the husband’s home and the abrupt negation of independent movement and visit to the maternal home transformed the ‘home’ to a ‘cage’. We can trace the reiteration of the metaphor of the ‘caged bird’-

‘pinjarabaddha pakhi’ in the autobiographical and nonfictional writings of the Bengali women writers of this period. The traditional Hindu family was a joint-family structure at that time and the child-bride was kept busy in doing the domestic chores throughout the day. She was literally a maid-servant in the household who was subjected to the orders and norms of the Hindu patriarchal set-up. According to the traditional Hindu custom, the Hindu wife was not allowed to meet her husband during daytime and large and complicated network of marital relationships with the in-laws put a substantial hindrance in the maturation of the conjugal relationships between the husband and the wife. This became a kind of confinement for the child-bride and it had worsened with the complete lack of liberty in her life. Both Kailashbasini and Rasasundari considered it as an ‘imprisonment’, ‘paradhinota’ and they pined for the freedom from this imposed confinement. Only Krishnabhabini rebelled against this imprisonment and went beyond the shackles of the patriarchal household to visit England.

This claustrophobic condition of marital life made it traumatic for the Bengali women who were deprived of the least pleasure of conjugal life. Conjugal love was a rarity at that time as the child-bride was not mature enough to realize the conjugal relationship and the growing distance between the husband and the wife resulted in the enumeration of the extra-marital relationship. The Hindu Brahminical custom of child-marriage, polyandry, Koulinya custom, and the resultant unequal marriage reflected an immature understanding of conjugal relationship and the consequent trauma for the women trapped in the vicious circle of subjugation and deprivation. A deeper research reveals that even the eminent personalities of the nineteenth century Bengal like Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Rajanarayan Basu, Kesabchandra Sen, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and others surrendered to the Hindu custom of child-marriage. Very few of the Western-educated husbands arranged for the education and the upliftment of their child-brides and that was the only ray of hope. Therefore, in this gloomy context the Bengali women writers like Kailashbasini Devi, Bamasundari Devi, Kumudini Devi, Nistarini Devi, Gyanadanandini Devi etc. were fortunate enough than their female contemporaries to escape the darkness of ignorance. But it was not a rosy journey. Their hard-earned expression was haunted by the trauma of the negation of the domesticity and Hindu norms which strictured ill-fate for the deviant women. The following sections will engage with some of the women’s writings which bears testimony to their journey from a child-bride to a *lekhika* or woman writer, how they mustered the courage to learn letters, how they began to write and what motivated them to this process of self-expression to expose the trauma of the child-marriage which had been the root cause behind the ignorance, immaturity and irrationality of women in colonial Bengal and which had been used as excuses to keep women away from the world of formal knowledge.

II

When Bamasundari Devi wrote ‘Ki Ki Kusanaskar Tirohito Hoile Shigro Edesher Sribiddhi Hoite Pare?’ (‘What Are the Superstitions That Must Be Removed for the Betterment of Our Country?’) in reply to the same question of Loknath Maitreyo, she wrote in this essay that abolition of child-marriage was necessary for the improvement of our country. Child-marriage initiated a traumatic married life not only for the child-bride, but also for the groom who was bound to an immature girl child. The early motherhood even before the body of the girl child got matured for pregnancy brought forth series of miseries on the lives of the husband and the wife. They were forced to parenthood in an immature condition, when they were neither financially capable to bear the responsibility of child-rearing nor they were emotionally mature to be parents. In consequence the child out of this immature bonding was thrown to a very traumatic childhood and the marital relationship between the husband and wife got severed resulting in a traumatic married life for the woman. Therefore, child marriage became one of the reasons behind the woeful condition of women and the ensuing troubles in the life of the immature couple and in their family. Bamasundari’s is pioneering in her rational analysis of child-marriage in the method of causality in formulating the analytical prose-language in Bengali. She writes:

The status of our country may improve if the system of child-marriage is abolished. Alas! O God, is the influence of this evil custom of our country going to multiply with time? Will it never abate? What tribulations people endure by being married off while still in a state of ignorance! Those who have committed this great sin of child marriage have to spend days and nights in finding bread to maintain their families. They have to endure continuous insults in their daily transactions, cursing themselves every moment on hearing the heart-rending cries of their hungry children, and to tolerate the fiery torment of remorse each time they are looking at the sad faces of their wives. A child produced before the body is fully matured can never be strong and healthy. (Bamasundari Devi, 22)

Bamasundari traced the root of child-marriage in the Hindu brahminical Koulinya custom which was one of the chief causes behind the traumatic married life of the Bengali upper caste Hindu women. Malini Bhattacharya discusses the Koulinya custom in detail:

An intricate and complex system of hierarchy among upper caste Bengalis said to have been instituted by Ballal Sen (twelfth century). It was a hierarchical demarcation based

on nine qualities that the kulins were supposed to possess, and meant to differentiate and give priority to brahmins and non-brahmins brought over to Bengal from north India over the indigenous brahmins and non-brahmins in order to maintain caste purity. It was a system of endogamy and hypergamy where social status was sought through marital alliance with a supposedly higher and purer rank within the same caste. It was regarded by nineteenth century reformers as one of the most shameful signs of the decadence of Hindu society, encouraging polygamy, a punishing system of dowry and bride price side by side (some paid dowry to attract the higher status groom; others, specially shrotriyas, sold their daughters to the highest bidder) as well as child marriage;... The shrotriyas were the highest in rank among the kulins, followed by the bangshajas. Those who were supposed to have demeaned their caste by marrying beneath them were called bhangas. (Malini Bhattacharya, 'Notes' to Bamasundari Devi, 24)

This understanding of the Koulinya custom can rationalize Bamasundari's critique of this heinous marital practice which threw the immature child-brides into the black hole of trauma where they were bound with grooms with huge age-gap. Their lives turned into hell with immature motherhood, malnourished offspring and early widowhood. Realizing this traumatic aspect of Hindu upper caste womanhood, Bamasundari wrote:

The country may benefit infinitely if the evil practice of Kulinism is withdrawn. Kulin Brahmins may take as many wives as they wish to. Even octogenarians among them have no difficulty in finding brides. The shorttriyas and bangshajas (who are inferior to the kulins in status) consider themselves fortunate to be able to hand over their daughters to them. A five-year old child may be handed over to a sixty-year old groom. It is said that many kulin Brahmins go through forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, even one hundred marriages. Alas! When such a polygamous man dies what numbers of wives fall into widowhood and go through unbearable suffering! Therefore, it is this marriage system which has become the repository of all evil and all kinds of sins. We must admit that acts of adultery and foeticide proceed from it (Bamasundari Devi, 21).

For Bamasundari, the picture is equally bleak for the Kulin daughters. She shows how “Large numbers of kulin maidens have to spend their whole lives in an unmarried state, their guardians having failed to find suitable grooms for them.” (Bamasundari Devi, 21). For the girl-child, this system of kulin marriage is a trap which threw her to a life-long traumatic marital bond in the name of caste purity, social status and religious performance.

Bamasundari had already traced the root of *balbaidhabya* or child-widowhood in the social custom of child-marriage and in the subsequent social norms of kulin marriage where there was yawning age-gap between the child-bride and the groom. She was quite sensitive towards the innumerable young widows born out of this traumatic system of kulin marriage. Nineteenth century Bengal was witness to the heart-wrenching pain inflicted upon the young widows who were compelled to sacrifice all their pleasures and desires of life in the name of performing the strict Hindu brahminic rituals of prescribed Hindu widowhood. In her emotive narration, Bamasundari captures the immense suffering of the widows:

O what untold and intolerable anguish has to be endured by these poor, powerless, ill-nourished young widows who are always weeping in their grieving hearts; no one taking pity on them or giving them the treatment that might redress this pain. They receive no redressal even when it is there. The fire within their hearts consumes them constantly. No one is merciful enough to give them a drop of water which may quench this fire. Even while there is water there is not a drop for them to drink. O One God! Where are you? O Truth! Are you still living? O Virtue! Have you disappeared altogether? A stone might break apart on hearing the sorrows of the child widows...How can child-widows console themselves? Women who have their sole support in their husbands weep and wail after being widowed, finding their whole world immersed in darkness as on a new moon night. Yet, alas, what matter of regret! No one feels the slightest mercy even after seeing and hearing such things all around him.

This penetrative analysis of the suffering of child-widowhood leads Bamasundari to support widow-remarriage. The studies of letters written by anonymous women and published in the nineteenth century Bengali periodicals like ‘Sambad Koumudi’, ‘Somprakasha’, ‘Bamabodhini Patrika’ etc. have already shown that how women had been staunch supporters of widow-remarriage even long before Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, the social reformer, had fought to pass the Widow Remarriage Act in

1859. The conservative Hindu brahminic groups vehemently opposed the passing of the Widow Remarriage Act in the name of colonial interference into the Hindu brahminic religious performance and the consequent corruption of Hindu women's purity. Amidst this socio-religious-cultural uproar, Bamasundari put up a sustained critique of Hindu brahminic customs of widowhood and strongly supported the cause of widow-remarriage when very few women took pen to stand by Vidyasagar's polemic. Rather we can also say, in Bamasundari's argument, we find a woman's perspective on the suffering of widowhood, on the necessity of widow-remarriage to alleviate this suffering.

Therefore, Bamasundari in her essay points out the negativities of the Hindu marriage discourse such as the Kulin marriage custom, child marriage, polygamy of the kulin men, the imposition of dowry and bride price and the subsequent early widowhood through which the Hindu marriage had become a traumatic bondage in the lives of Hindu women. She was pioneering in her sustained polemical critique of the Hindu marital norms and paved the way for the later women writers to lodge a counter-discourse against this normative model of Hindu brahminic marriage system.

III

Kailashbasini Devi followed the footprints of Bamasundari Devi in her critique of the Hindu brahminical custom which enforced the subordination of Hindu women within the fold of domesticity. Her writing presents politicization of the 'andarmahal', the inside, which is popularly known as 'sansar' - the domesticity for the Bengali Hindu women. Both Bamasundari and Kailashbasini understand the Hindu domestic system 'as a site of female suffering, discrimination and subordination' (Sarkar, xi). She marks certain registers determining the everyday existence of the Bengali Hindu women which are categorized within the broader intersectional structure of religion and gender. In Kailashbasini's book, *The Woeful Plight of Hindu Women* (*Hindu Mahilaganer Hinabastha*), she finds the various strands of the Koulinya custom, the brahminical patriarchy and the Hindu rituals as the causes behind the woeful condition of Hindu women, leading to the subsequent traumatic experiences.

Kailashbasini's book begins with the critique of the dominant social custom of discrimination between the boy child and the girl child:

But if, as fate may have it, a girl is born, the mother takes a look and sinks unspeakable gloom-what is more-is often moved to tears, a sign of utter misery, and the kin shows great distress....Are we so low that the times of our birth and death are equivalent? (Kailashbasini Devi, 26)

In this perspective, she retraces the root of the trauma of the child-marriage to this devaluation of the girl child in the Hindu Brahminical patriarchal household. The girl

child was supposed to be the burden which must be shed off in due time in accordance to the socio-religious norms. Kailashbasini echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's argument as presented in her essay, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' when she analytically shows how the girl child is deprived of formal education on the ground that "What business do they have in getting educated? Will they work outside to earn money? Let them be fed and keep house." (Kailashbasini Devi, 26). In reply to this patriarchal reasoning, Kailashbasini argues:

Alas, Education! Art thou there just for money, not for knowledge? Those who have no desire for earning money, will they be ever-apart from thee and pass their earthly lives in ignorance? Thanks to you, O social mores!

The sire does not educate his daughters, so they engage themselves wholly in illusory pleasures and pointless games. (Kailashbasini Devi, 26)

The patriarchal father fails to realize that the girl child will turn into wife and subsequently mother in accordance with the dominant social tradition and in Kailashbasini's language

These unlettered mothers teach their daughters exactly what they were taught themselves. They make their daughters perform various rituals and tell them what good these bring about- the daughters too accept the teachings as the word of God and follow them ever after. (Kailashbasini Devi, 27)

In the line of Bamasundari, but in a more stringent manner, Kailashbasini criticizes the Hindu marriage discourse based on the purity of caste hierarchy, the Koulinya custom, the prevalence of the dowry and bride price, and the perpetuation of social customs like child-marriage and the consequentially early widowhood without taking into consideration the issues of marital commitment and mutual competence. Kailashbasini thinks the child-marriage ensues a series of traumas in the life of the girl child as "It is one of the prime reasons for our wretched condition, the stepping-stone to our misfortune". She offers a penetrative analysis of the physical and mental tribulations the child-bride has to undergo and the domestic violence inflicted on the child-bride by the in-laws. The Hindu marriage system prescribes a compulsory uprooting of the child-bride from her paternal home. Kailashbasini shares her stand with Rasasundari Devi in her critique of this custom of forceful uprooting and the subsequent bondage of the child-bride within the enfolds her in-laws' home. Both of the women writers annotate this situation of the child-bride through the metaphor of 'caged bird' and 'caged animal' which poignantly reflects on the marital trauma of the child-bride. Kailashbasini writes:

Just as animals are trapped from the jungle by guile and force and brought to a human neighbourhood, where they are tamed through various ploys, similar wiles are used to bring the girl to submission. Like an animal, the girl is not subdued easily and behaves in the same way as a caged creature, which foregoing food and sleep, continues to brood over its old habitat and keeps looking around the cage for a way of escape. Head draped in a veil, she keeps scanning the cagelike house and goes without food or sleep, pining constantly for her parental home and counting her days to be back there. (Kailashbasini Devi, 42).

Rasasundari paints the same picture in her autobiography *Amar Jiban (My Life)* where she mourns her caged condition in her in-laws' home which seems to be prison to her in her early marital life. This status of women in marriage is theorized by Tanika Sarkar as 'ousted from the paternal lineage and implanted in the husband's lineage' (Tanika Sarkar, 19, 2001) which subsequently brings in 'permanent refugee' (Ibid) status for woman in both the paternal and the in-laws' homes.

The central argument of Kailashbasini's maiden book is targeted against the Hindu brahminic patriarchy, specifically the Koulinya custom and its different characteristics. We have already discussed the salient features of the Koulinya custom. This custom was chiefly followed by the two upper rungs of the Hindu *Barna* system, the Brahmins and the Kayasthas. This Koulinya custom or Kulinism ultimately resulted in polyandry among men, child-marriage and early-widowhood. In this perspective, Kailashbasini strongly criticizes the importance of monetary status and the caste hierarchy in the Hindu marriage discourse. She shows how the parent's anxiety in marrying off the daughters to Kulin husbands, even if there is drastic age-difference, brings in unhappy and traumatic marital life for both the husband and the wife. She points out the dark side of child-marriage which was imposed on the immature couple in order to achieve caste purity and social prestige:

For a while, such a marriage does look agreeable to the relatives, but is nevertheless completely shattering to the wedded children since they have no say in this matter. Thus, when they grow up and are able to judge right and wrong, they spend their lives in utter misery, enduring each others' merits and demerits. (Kailashbasini Devi, 38)

This decision of child-marriage was often motivated by the Hindu *sastric* doctrine of marriage as an essential end in a woman's life. She presents how this irrational insistence on marrying the daughter with Kulin husband or Kayastha son to Kulin

daughter results in heavy dowry or bride price respectively. Through a series of anecdotes Kailshbasini represents the problems of the Kulin daughters, the polyandry of the broken kulin, the kulin descendant's wiles to move upward in social hierarchy and the selling of bride to attain this, shrotrya brahmin's demand for bride-price and the Baidik Brahmins' child-marriages. In this argumentative way, she problematises the Hindu religious discourse of marriage through a poignant critique of Brahminism.

It is interesting to note that even outside this traumatized marital arrangement the presence of love and the subsequent social marriage after the love relationship were not unprecedented then.

However, Kailashbasini's radicalism lies in her stringent critique of the patriarchal customs, rituals and social mores which normativised the suppression of woman's agency within the Hindu domesticity in colonial Bengal. Her argument is important as she de-glorifies the woman as domestic angel phenomena and stresses on the necessity of woman's education and woman's agency which can free women from the bondage of marital norms and relieve the marital trauma.

IV

Child marriage is not an outdated custom in India. Rather it is a glaring truth prevalent any many corners of the rural India even now. Another interesting factor is, though the changing socio-cultural, economic scenario has given birth to the nuclear family concept, it fails to stop the displacement of women from their paternal home after marriage. The Gen Y is still handcuffed to the Hindu Brahminical upper caste marital norms which have been perpetuating this uprooting and the necessary reversal of a woman's identity, ensuing divergent spacio-temporal adjustments. The marital rape which has been a chief source of marital trauma has not been taken under the purview of legal prohibition until now. The general silence on the daily dose of intolerance which a woman has to face and co-habit with reinforces the trauma. Therefore these texts, which first in their limited range addressed the trauma, their possible survival through the resistive act of writing, map out a radical possibility of woman's agency.

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Refashioning the 19th and 20th Century Bengali Women through Education: Exploring the Periodical Letters

Nibedita Paul

“Where ignorance is bliss, ’tis folly to be wise”

-Thomas Gray

William Adam wrote in the 1836 Report on the State of Education, there prevailed a superstitious belief among the women in majority of the Hindu families that a girl taught to read and write would soon after marriage become a widow. This misguided notion was not discouraged by the men either, in fact the female had forever depended on the men for subsistence and performed rituals to ascertain their longevity. The older women of the family saw the urge for education as self destructive which would ultimately lead a woman to her death. Print culture came to India in the sixteenth century with the Portuguese setting up the printing press in the subcontinent. However, the real prosperous years of print happened in the nineteenth century at Battala, the black town of Calcutta. The cheap printing fostered the reading public as books were available at very low prices and also there was a rapid growth in the number of publications. From 1813 the Company began to set aside some money for education and right after the Charter of 1833 English became the official language, (Forbes *Women in Modern India*, 36). Soon along with the Brahmo Samaj arrived the periodicals which voiced out the need for women’s education which was considered a blasphemy even in the previous years. Women have been seen as silent, veiled and mute shadows before their oppressor. Even though they have faced much subjugation they have not been helpless victims as through the agency of writing they displayed unexpected reserves of courage, resistance and energy. There existed some indomitable women who did harbour the urge for education and their life instances were more poignantly reflected in their autobiographies. It is through these muffled voices that the women’s own perspective is projected out which can question the stereotypes. Despite the male prejudice a lot of girls’ schools and later colleges came up, mostly due to the efforts of the missionaries who wanted the women to be compatible partners of their colonial husbands who worked for the English. They wanted the wives to learn the English language as otherwise traditionally educated women would split the household into two worlds which would hamper the colonial workings. All throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth century one can see the rise and transformation of the women’s question finally enabling her to carve out a place for herself in the world

of letters. It is through these personal and public writings that history and social science of the time can be best deciphered. This paper proposes to examine the modernisation of women in the later colonial period through the periodical letters concerning edification of women, written by the female readers themselves addressing the editors of the various magazines that were rampant then in every Bengali household. There was a transition in the twentieth century with education of girls becoming a common scenario and as the country was preparing for autonomy women moved from interior to exterior and took the lead in various political and social changes. The methodology for the paper has been largely historical and sociological while examining the periodical letters.

The first periodical was the *Samachar Darpan* published by the Baptist Missionary Press in 1818 (Bhattacharya *A Guide*, 5) which soon encouraged the indigenous publishers to come up with their own papers and journals. That the women had the audacity to take a bold step of writing back and suggesting what would be the better alternatives for them was a way to retaliate the subjugating attitude of the patriarchy. *Sambad Kaumudi*, by Rammohan was the first paper which carried the first letter by a woman who wrote for new reforms in social conditions for women and had signed her name as ‘*Amuki Devi*’ (A Certain Lady) as she did not wish to disclose her identity. Her letter was an attack on the Kulin custom of marriage which had deprived many like her from the joys of marriage. She has lamented how the unfortunate and the poor are most often the preys of polygamy as they are left with no other option but to accept it as a last resort. In her letter she asks for the termination of this system. *Gyan Anweswan* was started by the followers of Derozio and it boldly pointed out how through the excuse of the Shastras the women and the Shudras were the only ones kept away from the light of knowledge so that a fine class of upper caste men is created who could rule over them at ease. *Shomprakash*, known for its liberal and logical arguments went ahead to publish three letters by women who spoke against the system, (Bhattacharjee *Reflective*, xii-xiii). It was unfortunate how despite such eye-opening polemical writings there were a great number of people who opposed these dauntless ideas.

Even though they belong to the sub-genre of public narratives, the letters broke the hackneyed forms of novels and conduct books. They are seen as cryptographic messages decoding the experiences of the nineteenth century Bengali women. The novels and handbooks kept on reinforcing the binaries of *ghor-bahire* (home and public) and the old and new patriarchy. The letters on the other hand were directly voiced without the medium of any fiction. They were the product of what a reformist had said, ‘let the women decide what they want’. With the self in focus their writings became emancipatory. (Vaid *Recasting Women*, 113) The letter as a form was more pliable as it did not need any legitimisation and acted as a confidant of the writer. The periodical letters came before the autobiography and in the beginning more women

chose to vent out their thoughts through the letters rather than through the form of personal narrative. Even though the letters were a courageous outpouring of the women, yet one can never sideline the fact that as the editors and critics of the papers were male so the polemical writings were censored by them before being published. The letters taken for analysis in this paper deal with what the women had to express regarding the various reforms that took place regarding their education system. The letters had a common, intimate and intense relation with God which was more than any literary trope. It might have been a desire for spiritual communion with the Supreme that resonated out of a deep despair and disillusionment.

The first letter is by Kailashbasini Gupta. She had previously detailed the doleful conditions of the Hindu women in her book, *The Degraded Condition of Hindu Women* and *The Practice of Education among Innocent Hindu Girls*. In her essay, 'Hindu Mahilaganer Hinabastha' (The Woeful Plight of Hindu Women) she urges the fathers of the daughters to take the initiative for sending the child to a school, even though later on the girl child might not go out to earn money yet it is her basic right to knowledge. Kailashbasini's writing is more in the form of a call where she asks the Bengali girls to come out of their houses and follow the path of knowledge in order to be virtuous. The essay elaborates on the wrongdoings of Kulin marriage and how due to the lack of knowledge the woman is forever chained in that system. Her periodical letter vehemently attacks how the women were shunned from education by referring to the Shastras which said that education was for the one who would earn not for the female sect who was destined to stay indoors. If at all any woman acquired knowledge then it would be a matter of much pride to her which she would not share with other women, in fact she would even go to the extent of discouraging the other enthusiasts. The women who acquired education were seen as cursed and others were warned from going near her. Being much ahead of her time Kailashbasini found the taste of the then publications highly sentimental and saw the Bengali home as a dark quarter of ignorance. The public space for women was tainted by the concept of domestic space, so she wanted the women to reinvent their own space through education which was not possible otherwise. The similar thought was also voiced by Abanindranath Tagore later, (Chattopadhyay *Representing*, 264).

Soudamini Devya starts her letter, published in 1866 in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, by lamenting the gender inequality that prevailed in the society. She interrogates that the even though both the sexes have been endowed equal capability for religious and intellectual potential then why would men be the only ones to enjoy the fruits of enlightenment. With exact emotion and pathos she addresses the nationalists and says as to how the life of women shrouded in mockery is nothing more than an imitation of life and questions as to how long the women have to remain bound to their *antahpur* and be disengaged from the fruits of learning and enjoyment. This notion of the women

not being allowed any participation in the public domain has been contested by Swati Chattopadhyay who is of the opinion that it was a clever tactic of the men to maintain their own neat domains both in the public and the private. Even though the social justification was to protect a woman's body and the *ghor* (home) from any taint this was also a reason to protect the freedom of the men. The neat demarcations of the two worlds would facilitate the men to maintain their position and privacy with the *baiji* (courtesan) and the *bou* (wife), (Chattopadhyay *Representing*, 265).

The third letter is by Nagendrabala Mustaphi. She had previously published two conduct books for women and a novel. In her letter published in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, she gives a partial solution to the women's problems voiced in Soudamini Devya's letter. Much like her conduct book, *Nari Dharma* (Woman's Dharma) here too she lays much emphasis on music. Written in the tone of the handbook and with the guidance of preserving conjugal life she advises how the women must be trained in singing or any musical instrument. This comes utilitarian as then after the men returns from work he would not go to any courtesan for recreation but would very much remain at home. For Mustaphi it is the conjugal love and desire to safeguard it rather than the emancipation of the women which comes through education. The main reason to include this letter in the sub-category of Education is because the achievement of the musical skills for the wife was not accepted by the old patriarchal system. Music was seen as a baser form of art which was reserved for the courtesan while the wife was expected to maintain the household and religious *dharma* meticulously, Nagendrabala's emphasis on music was also on the individualistic level where she says how it calms and soothes the singer or player and relieves one from the daily schedule. With the onset of nationalism and the need to educate the women music too became a saving grace among the various skills that the wife harboured.

The collection contains three letters by Krishnabhabani Das, whose novel *England-e-Bangamahila* (A Bengali Lady in England) published in 1882 was a pioneer work in prose writing. It was in the same year that the Hunter Commission had reviewed the progress of female education and made serious efforts towards developing primary schools for girls and teacher's training institutions. Liberal grants, scholarships and prizes were recommended by the authors of the Report for girl's schools rather than boys, (Forbes *Women in Modern India*, 44-5). Krishnabhabani's letters are intellectually very sound and reflect how she herself had widely read and travelled, though crossing the sea meant ritual ex-communication within upper caste Hindus. Her first letter published in *Sahitya* in 1892 was criticised by Rabindranath Tagore as he felt that her writing was echoing the feminist movements that were happening across the sea. Tagore's concern was similar to the other intellectual men who wanted the Indian women to retain their essence and not become *memsahib*-like i.e. "autonomous bourgeois self", (Chakrabarty 'The Difference', 64). Krishnabhabani

makes a survey of the American education system and the glorious future the women writers were making. The prose is underlined with remorse that she feels at the condition of her own nation's women. She advocates how the women writers like the Brontes, Austen, George Eliot, Miss Braydun through their pen were earning enough to make them financially independent. She shows how writing was a viable prospect for the women without having to trespass the public domain. While talking about the Western girl's school she shows how those institutes focused on edification and a holistic development of the pupil as she was taught cooking, physical education, history, theosophy along with the academic syllabi. Probing further into the American system she finds female doctors and attorney's doing a commendable work for themselves as she cites various examples to inspire her Indian readers. In the nineteenth century the middle class women were tied in the archetypal role of the mother, daughter, wife yet, the few who managed to make a career of their own mostly took up teaching or medicine as they were seen as respectable jobs.

By the late nineteenth century Britain was concerned with the rationalising of women's health as a result of which the mid-wives and female healers were discarded for trained nurses. The nationalistic and civilising ideas came up with emphasis on the body as they saw the English system working successfully on the proper exercising of the health and hygiene which got reflected on the ideas working behind their nation. Books on physical education began to suggest how it was necessary for individuals to go through all round development. This inculcation of *dharmabuddhi* began with the conduct books and other public narratives focusing on educating the women in the new rule of the body. Schools run by missionaries and Brahmos laid emphasis on health and hygiene and in *Padmarag* too one can see how the poor sanitation life of students often led them to fall sick and miss out on their lessons for months. Anurupa Debi in her letter to *Bharatbarsha* in 1921 majorly focuses on the need for physical education for girls and women. Years of being confined to the inner quarters deteriorates their health and later being buried in heaps of books takes a heavy effect on their mental constitution. She finds the men interacting better with natural air as they can walk while women stay confined to crowded buses which makes them fragile and weak.

Krishnabhabani through her writing was contesting the conservative literati who would think education and emancipation of women was a step towards bringing both the gender at par which would further increase competition between the male and female in all walks of life. Whereas, she tries to show the other depiction where the educated female can contribute to nation building as then it would be both on an individual and collective platform. She further affixes women's education to a harmonious conjugal life as through a proper form of knowledge system the woman can train the man in morality and religion. The second letter is a reply that

Krishnabhabani gives to her critics who had cruelly attacked her first letter. Quoting from the first letter she says how her ignorant critics had failed to read her words carefully as she had made it clear how no man can ever appreciate an ignorant woman and also how the educated woman at no cost would be jeopardising her responsibility at home as through proper knowledge she can exercise her duties with competence. In this letter too she gives examples of various avenues the women can explore that would liberate them from their caged-bird existence and enable them to grow sounder intellectually. Validating her argument logically she uses the letter space to reach out again to the women as she advises how they must use their discretionary power like the men in decision making and that they were not created to remain ignorant or live a baser life of irrationality and unreason.

Passionate about the women's purpose she does not leave out any opportunity to inspire, educate and make the women aware of her condition. This same strain gets reflected in her third letter, published in 1905 in, *Naba Noor* a liberal journal which later published Rookeya Sakhawat's oeuvres, here Krishnabhabani uses the various example of peasant women to show how due to the lack of minimal knowledge the women could not take care of their children. During the latter half of the nineteenth century women's education had become a common issue and women were taught the basics of accounts to enable them to run the household smoothly. However, the lower rung of hierarchy was still steeped in ignorance and it is to this segment of the society to which the third letter is addressed to. Krishnabhabani has not only travelled far and wide in fact her experiences with the poor women were first-hand. She cites instances, of how the peasant women would leave their infants on the garden and go to work unaware of the insects or animals that could harm them or, how the Swiss women have to take up the heavy job of plantation which leaves their men idle. The abolition of Serfdom in Russia had not changed the crude, slave like lifestyle of the people, the men spend their time drinking and gambling while the women does the household work while leaving the children unattended. This imbalance of responsibility, says the writer is due to the lack of knowledge which is more worthy than the feminine quality of fragility, humility and modesty.

African American writer Audre Lorde in her work *Sister Outsider* (1984) had said, "Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves." This 'change' in the Bengali household in the nineteenth century meant that the marriage must reflect the Victorian patriarchal ideal of 'companionate marriage', (Chakravarty 'The Difference', 51) that women must equally participate with the men in the public, the major reason to obstruct which was that the men could not stand to lose their much coveted position of being God-like which the new patriarchy had sanctioned them. Dinesh Chandra while talking about Rasasundari

Devi's autobiography had said that their public world was under the command of the British which left them humiliated, ruined and dependent so, the Indian men constructed their women as repository of all that was pristine and worthy, the home became the only space for exercising their ego was the home- the change and cultivation of which would threaten their ground. The similar plea for *change* that was voiced by Lorde is seen in the letter of Swarnakumari Devi, published in *Pradip* in 1900.

Founder of the Ladies' Theosophical Society and Sakhi Samiti, Swarnakumari championed the zenana education system. The two organisations were also engaged in that very cause, the members after finishing their own education would take up the work of zenana education for which the organisations would give them some remuneration. It was a system of "private tuition", (Borthwick *The Changing*, 69) which first came with the missionaries. The European lady would visit the Bengali home and impart knowledge to the female inmates in the *antahpur*; this was appropriate as it did not disturb the purdah. However, the evangelical motives had soon entered this system as a result of which the men feared the missionary's act as a way of transforming their religion. When the houses closed their doors to the British teachers, Hindu women came out to take their place- Brahmo Samaj and the Vaishnavite ladies being a forerunner of this. Swarnakumari Devi and the members of her association were engaged in similar work about which they extensively wrote in the periodicals to gain strength. Her letter quite elusively talks of the zenana system, the ways and norms of the zenana and how at one time the Vaishnavite females were engaged in training the zenana women in religion and social custom. Being from progressive Brahmo household, one can see how the family was advanced not only in dress and habit but also in logicity and cognition. More in the autobiographical manner, she narrates in detail her experience with the zenana culture. The segment focusing on her brother, Satyendranath Tagore highlights how the change came to the Tagore family through him as he treated his wife as an equal and objected to her being carried in a palanquin, first ostracised but after some years the couple was very much part of the house. Swarnakumari got married at the age of eighteen under the Brahmo marriage rite and a year later her husband took her to Bombay for education. By that time things at Jorasanko had changed with the women becoming ardent learners of music and experimenting with their clothes. The letter is an insider to the reforms that took place in the Brahmo house of Tagore which took quite some time to reach out the other middle-class households.

Nirupama Devi's letter published in *Antapur* in 1905 is an advice to the parents and a plea from getting their young daughters married off at an early age. Education and schooling, she says, become part of a game which abruptly comes to a halt with marriage. The idea of youthful marriage limited the girls's school going years and prepared her for the duties of wife and mother. Prevalent as it was in the nineteenth

century the husbands would be tutoring their young wives behind closed doors, so too parents presumed the same and thought it would be the groom who would educate their daughters. However, changed scenarios in the colonial time had led most of the young husbands to settle far from their immediate family, in which case either the wife would be left with her in-laws where she would have to work laboriously ignoring her health, happiness and future or she would accompany her husband and become the head of the household in her new home where managing the order would be impossible without prior knowledge and experience. Nirupama Devi tells the women too to take charge of their future and find their roles in life. They must engage in fruitful discussions and debates the results of which would benefit the society. Financial independence is one of the prime concerns for these women writers as they find depending on the husbands money for beautification objects absolutely illogical and improper. Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain in *Motichur* subverts the idea of beauty and says that women are living as slaves even though slavery was abolished years ago, the women's jewelled chokers she says are like dog chains and like the bear with a noose ring the husband when angry can pull her wife's long tresses implying how the women make it easier for the men to subjugate them. With elucidations she says the jewellery that the women wear is not to glamorise them but to exhibit their husband's money which can in no way contribute to her development. She asks the women to rise from the stage enslavement and emancipate themselves through knowledge.

The thought of having a cause in life is again reverberated in Kamini Roy's letter published in *Bharat Mahila* in 1906, where she says that even death would be pardoned if it is for a noble cause, aimless life leads one to nowhere but to despair and this can only be overcome by participating in the on goings of the society. Her other letter published is more dense in content as she begins by describing the term education which starts from the time one is born. Bringing instances of various oral poems she shows how those short pieces would be discouraging the women from any form of education and that she could barely read and write was another quality added for fetching a better groom. As the whole notion of school and education had become much talked about Kamini Roy asks the women to make use of their knowledge by getting a social position for their selves. Akin to Sarah Stickney Ellis's conduct book *The Women of England* she too tells the women to find compatible partners for their selves or better not to involve in matrimony. To her the women must have a say and freedom to make decision as incompatibility could lead both the husband and wife to live a life of utter misery.

With nationalism becoming a major concern the responsibility of protecting national ideas fell on women but they never raised the question as to why the burden of preserving values remained only their responsibility. Labanyaprabha Basu in her letter to *Bharat Mahila* published in 1907 does not question the 'why' but rather satiates the justification

for the prevalent dictum. She uses sound examples to legitimise herself and says that just like Lady Macbeth can push men to danger similarly Draupadi can recover a villain and direct him to the path of virtue. She looks ahead to a time when women would be moving freely in public much like Bankim's novel *Subarna Golak*. She urges the women to progress ahead and asks them to learn more than basic accounts and reading. Giving example of Madame Curie she says how she had worked alongside her husband in the discovery of radium which earned them the Noble Prize, science she says is not confined to men alone. The women must equally be educated in scientific discipline to enable them to do better in life, she contests the old notion of how science was for men and women would lose their feminine grace by indulging in it. Citing Madame Curie and a few other women of note she demonstrates how they have neither lost their womanly virtues nor have they disregarded their responsibilities as mothers and wives. Rokeya felt it was important that women familiarise themselves with science to enable modernity, in *Sultana's Dream* a feminist utopia, she extensively uses the aid of science and technology to illustrate the workings of Ladyland. When faced with threat from other country, the women made valuable inventions in the science universities and saved their country from the hostilities of war, one such discovery was to draw water directly from the clouds and the other was to enable solar heat. Apart from them they also facilitated air travel and the cultivation of land by electricity. The neat and harmonious working of science and technology made the place a enlightened place of virtue and assiduous souls who were committed for their nation's welfare.

Labanyaprabha in her work becomes the precursor of Rokeya as she challenges the old notion of educated women denying any household chores by saying that education would enable them to carry out their work more efficiently. She asks the women to keep the image of the saintly Gaitri and Maitrayee to enable them to achieve and do anything. The journal *Bharat Mahila* was befitting as along with prose pieces it made the readers aware of the various women's meetings and committees that were held along with speeches of women leaders from all across the globe, (Bhattacharjee *Reflective*, xli). These writings by and about the Hindu Bengali women were different in tone than the earlier prose pieces which were heavily didactic and consultative in flavour. They are partially cathartic as the women through a third person narration chooses to talk of the society at large which also brings the point of how the women tends to project their life within the conceptual framework of other lives, (Karlekar *In So*, x).

The letter by Bibi Khayrunnesha, published in 1905 in *Naba Noor* starkly stands out among the collection of periodical letters as she scrutinises the Muslim women's education system which had not been extensively addressed before by any other writer. In the nineteenth century the Muslims lived a life of conservatism and tradition

that barred them from the progressive light of education. All that appears about them during the glorious years of Bengal are limited to the footnotes and references that are found. Soon enough by the turn of the century their men complained of how the women were backward and unable to provide companionship to the husbands or discipline their sons. The letter highlights how education was a *farz* (duty) of both the genders and was sanctioned in *Hadis Sharif* as a key to happy and prosperous home. *Purdah* being their essential custom had also acted as a barrier in interaction; second Khayurnnesha says the majority of the Muslim population in Bengal is below poverty line which makes education a luxury and affordable only to the elite. She complains about the lack of any particular organisation which would look after the welfare of the Muslims and enhance education among them. She hopes for a school which would allow women to learn while they could stay in *purdah* and that they must be administered by lady teachers from the same religious background along with the establishment of committees that would overlook the workings of various aspects of the school.

The 'new women' were the beneficiaries of the social reforms and educational progress that began with the nineteenth century, these confident women stepped forward to form their own schools and organisations so that they could uplift their sisters. Though aware of the orthodox and uncooperative attitudes people expressed towards women's education yet there parents who wanted to sent their daughters to schools which would not jeopardise their customs. Education as seen by Rokeya was the only way to erase the pronounced distinction between public and private, she laboured for a holistic development where education could make the woman financially independent and give her a stable chance in the domestic and political front. Education has been seen as a key towards emancipation and the need for education that began with the reading of conduct books to make the women good and companionate wives of the colonial husbands had gone a long way to usher in metamorphosis in the channelization of the knowledge system where women would not only voice out their opinions under the guise of pseudonyms but they would liberally move about in their work space to gain a social footing for their own self. Rokeya in her essay, 'Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl' opines that the girls be educated in the line of western methods which would nurture them holistically and set them as models. The earlier women saints like Maitrayee and Damayanti have been used as illustrations so repeatedly that they have been now customised to narrow zones, so the new women must reconstruct the ideal image of woman so that others can internalise them. She opposed the blatant imitation of western ideals as that would not function in the Indian concept so she urges the mothers and wives to harness their intellect in both the realms of society which would also lead to a change of men's attitude, knowledge behaviour towards women. The first generation learner's expressed themselves through their penned stories which were acted upon by the next generation however, they all had articulated

their marginalised position very well which made the female institutions conservative and strict law maintainers. The more they mixed with the outer world they realised how limited their autonomy was- harassed, ostracised, teased and marginalised. Not acknowledging their limited periphery they continued to stretch their limitations further which led them to take full charge of their future and of redefining their role.

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Marriage, Sexual Initiation and Sense of Violation: Clinical Experience and the Ethico-Political

Samata Biswas

The Beginning

A married girl of 19 years of age came to me for psychological testing. I knew that I was never going to see her again because she had come to me only for psychological testing. That was the last working day for me (I had resigned by then); so even if the girl is referred for further therapy, I knew that I will not see her again. Her statements (along with her mother and her husband's statements) made me feel helpless... helpless because I felt not only I will never see her again but also, I did not know how I could be of any help. Further, her situation is not something unknown to us; many other girls are suffering from the same problem; many others are not allowed to speak up or seek help.

Taking off from the question of the suffering of the young 'married' girl, I began to think about the paper. For explanation, I present the whole case. (The actual names are not used. I am putting the case in quotation).

"A girl (say, Rita) of nineteen years, married for the last seven months, was referred due to the problem of marital maladjustment. She was sent back to her parents' residence by her husband (not by force, she was more than willing to go back). According to her, she could not tolerate her husband (though she stated at one and the same time that he is a 'nice' person). She said that whenever her husband touched her or tried to be intimate, she became irritated and felt a burning sensation on her skin. Just after marriage, for about 15 days she was happy. But then, in those 15 days the couple was not able to consummate their marriage. 'Sexual initiation' (in the given sense) was so painful that her husband could never 'have' sexual intercourse with her. Her husband never forced her, but when she started avoiding his advances, he said some rude things to her (which she did not want to say). After which she is feeling more aversive to her husband. Now she cannot live with her husband anymore. But her parents do not want her to be separated and they are forcing her to go back to her in-law's house. Her mother is frequently having fits (it could be [*sic*] hysteric ones), and everyone is blaming her for her mother's ill health. She feels, if she goes back to her in-laws, she will die. The thought of committing suicide has crossed her mind."

Now I am giving the mother's version of the case. "Her mother seemed very anxious. According to her, she married her daughter early because her son died in an accident two years back and she pinned her hope on the fact that when her daughter will give birth to a boy child, it will, in actuality, bring her son back. Her daughter did not want to marry, she wanted to study. When Rita was unwilling, she became sick; also, Rita's father's health was not in good shape. So, with much resistance Rita got married. After marriage she was happy, and her husband appeared to be a very nice man ('man' nevertheless). In the in-law's house she never faced any kind of physical torture. She was also allowed to study junior teacher training course. At present, her mother thought that she is having some mental illness and that is causing all the problem".

The case has many 'folds'. While I was taking the case history from each individual, each was giving a different perspective. The result of the test was giving another¹. But one thing was prominent in the case was that there was no physical force, no physical violence, no (marital) 'rape' (I am considering the concept of 'marital rape' as something unfamiliar in our society despite what the legal system depicts) involved. One can ask, 'where is the sense of violation or transgression'? In the beginning, I was thinking whether the problem was related to the question of 'sexual orientation' or was it related to may be an (un)conscious rebellion of the girl against the mother's insistence on marriage. My mind wondered; I had no clues; and yet I could feel the girl's pain.

When I spoke to Rita's husband, it gave me another perception; a picture which was more problem specific. According to Rita's husband, Rita seemed happy in the beginning and as per his knowledge; she was willing to get married. She was physically close to him. Sometimes she herself initiated physical intimacy. He, in detail, stated the contours of their physical relationship. Although I had not asked for the details of their physical relationship, he was rather explicit and vivid in his description. He emphasized on the word 'virginity'; he was sure Rita was 'virgin' because she felt pain when he tried to 'penetrate'. The question of Rita's virginity was rather important to him². But she continuously avoided having intercourse and she pushed him away when he tried to penetrate her; although he never forced her. She seemed aloof after 15 days of marriage. She started avoiding him and tried to stay away (her teacher training course was residential) as much as possible. Whenever he tried to touch her, she showed resistance and irritation. She wanted some more time ('*amake arektu somoy dao*').

Eventually, he became frustrated and sent her back to her parent's house and she did not show any resistance. Now he wants her to seek medical help for her 'problem'; come back home and lead a 'normal married life'. At the end of the history taking session he stated that in the beginning (i.e. within the 'happy' 15 days) when

she was not able to bear the pain of penetration, he said to her '*tumi more jao*' (you die), somewhat casually. Perhaps he was by now too frustrated by her aversion to 'penetrative sex'."

From the entire case history, some points crossed my mind. Among them two expressions worried me the most; one is *tumi more jao* and the other is *amake arektu somoy dao*. I will come to the analysis of these two expressions later; as of now I would like to touch upon three points; first, the pressure created upon her by her parents to get married; second, the expectation of her mother from Rita to give birth to a boy child and third, the husband's emphasis on the word 'virginity'.

Marriage, Virginity and Morality: Entrenched Compulsion

Marriage is somewhat a compulsion for Indian women. It is compulsory for the parents to get their daughters married. Parents feel that if their daughter is given by way of marriage to a 'reasonably successful' man then they are through with their responsibility. According to them, if the in-laws allow to study or work, it is enough and that is all that matters in a girl's life. How the displacement of the girl from the parent's house to the in-laws' house affects her is not important because she is destined to get married, to get displaced. She will have to adapt to the completely different atmosphere in which she is now placed. In Rita's case, her parents played the health card and emotional blackmailing worked. This is also a very common feature of our culture³.

Marriage is as if only "the destiny, traditionally offered to women by society... most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer for not being.... [further] Marriage has always been very different for man and for woman... [in marriage] the contracts are made between father-in-law and son-in-law... in such circumstances the girl seems absolutely passive; she is married, *given* in marriage by her parents. Boys get married, they take a wife" (Beauvoir, 1989 [1949]: 425-429).

Beauvoir shows how for woman the act of love in marriage is "*service* rendered to the man; he *takes* his pleasure... woman body something he buys" (Beauvoir, 1989 [1949]: 430).

Again, the pressure of giving birth to a boy child is also a common feature in our society. In this case, the mother had lost her son; the death of her son had, as if, made her incomplete, which in turn leads to the expectation that through the birth of her grandson, she will get back her own son⁴. The idea of mandatory motherhood along with the significance of giving birth to a male child is again a debatable issue.

Third, the importance of 'virginity', which conveys the idea(l) of the chastity of women. Evidence of virginity is important for the man because he feels that the woman is his property and he is the first person to 'invade' the secret zone of the woman's body. For a man, it is a conquest.

He wishes to conquer, to take, to possess; to have a woman is to conquer her... (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 152)

...the paternalistic ethics imperatively demand that the fiancée be given over to her husband in virginal condition; he wants to be sure she carries no stranger's seed; he wants single and exclusive ownership of the flesh he is making his own; virginity took on a moral, religious, and mystical value, and this value is still generally recognized today. (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 439-440)

In our culture, virginity is sanctified; the woman's (Rita's) pain conveys the message to the man (her Husband) the proof of virginity; the proof that he is the sole owner of the body and no one before him has 'invaded' the body. Here lies the two-edged sword for the woman. If she does not feel any pain then she would be considered a 'used' woman, i.e., a 'loose' woman and her chastity would be under question. Again, if she feels excessive pain, which, in turn, makes her 'unwanted' to her husband who dubs her as a frigid woman. Will the right amount of pain also be determined by man ?

From this note I come to the expression '*tumi more jao*' – that is, it is better you die than not let me penetrate (i.e. have pleasure). It connotes the sense of being sexually dead or frigid. This shows perhaps the relation between language and the subject. She does exactly what she was told to do; she does it in a sexual sense. An attention to language in general, an attention to the "relation between the signifier and the subject", to the "most radical determinant's of [wo]man's relation to the signifier" (Lacan, 2006: 449), would show once again how the expression '*tumi more jao*' would disrupt Rita's affective contours.

...a maladroit lover or husband may give rise to an inferiority complex, on which lasting neurosis will sometimes be grafted; and the woman may feel such resentment as will lead to obstinate frigidity. (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 382)⁵

Here the conventional medical explanation would be of 'frigidity' (or vaginismus). One can ask: why does medicine see frigidity in situations that are 'laughed away' by Luce Irigaray along with her client. Is it because medicine works under the assumption of a rather (hetero) normative ideal of sex and sexuality, an 'ideal' that could be conveniently called phallogentric. Is it because medicine is driven by the 'One organ' (the phallus) and the 'One act' (the penetrative) model of sexuality. Here it would not be all together out of context to invoke the Irigarayan critic of the very concept of frigidity.

Many women believe they are ‘frigid’, and they are often told this is so. When a Woman tells me that she is ‘frigid’, I laugh, and tell her I don’t know what it means. She laughs too, which brings about a release, and which means, first of all, that she has been moulded into models of male sexual ‘techniques’ which do not correspond to her sexuality – namely the teleology of the orgasm... The teleological model is, to repeat, possible for a man – even if he thus loses pleasure – but not for a woman... (Irigaray, [1977] as quoted by Dhar, 2000: 77)

While the man says “*Tumi More Jao*” the woman says, “*Amake arektu somoy dao*”. She wants time – perhaps she wants more than the eleven minutes⁶ offered to her, surely, she wants more than two minutes⁷. She wants time in two senses perhaps; time before and after sex, time outside of sex; time within sex, so as to be prepared, so as to be a participant. She wants perhaps something more than just sex. Does she want affection? Does she crave for caresses? Not just sexual ones; but ones that are outside of and beyond the sexual. Does she want to talk to her husband? Talk for hours? Talk without purpose? Without a fixed goal? Without beginning and end? Does she want to cuddle, giggle without purpose?

Relationality versus Functionality: A Gendered Perspective

May be she does not need to make beds creak. Perhaps she craves to sleep together merely as children do, cuddling, touching, giggling, reliving girlhood – like friends more than lovers. “Sharing a bed, sharing a bathtub, baking gingerbread cookies, trying on each other’s clothes” (Coetzee, 2000: 86).

While women crave for relation, a man when he reaches out towards his partner “remains at the centre of this activity, being, on the whole, the *subject* as opposed to *objects* that he perceives as *instruments* that he manipulates;...the feminine flesh is for him a prey, and through it he gains access to the qualities he desires, as with any object. To be sure, he fails in taking actual possession of them for himself, but at least he embraces them. The caress, the kiss, imply a partial check; but this check itself is a stimulant and a pleasure. The act of love is completed in the orgasm, its normal outcome. Coition has a definite physiological end and aim; in ejaculation” (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 371).

For woman ‘this always constitutes a kind of violation’ (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 372). For the man “the act of love is conquest, victory” (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 375). More importantly the act, “involving the pollution of one person by another confers a certain pride upon the polluter and some humiliation upon the polluted, even when she

consents.” (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 375). Further, “Women as a rule are unfamiliar with violence, they have not been through the tussles of childhood and youth as have men; and now the girl is laid hold of, swept away in a bodily struggle in which the man is the stronger. She is no longer free to dream, to delay, to manoeuvre: she is in his power, at his disposal. These embraces, so much like hand-to-hand tussle, frighten her, for she has never tussled. She is used to the caresses of a fiancé, a comrade, a colleague, a civilized and polite man; but now he takes on peculiar aspect, egoistical and headstrong; she is without recourse against this stranger. It is not uncommon for the young girl’s first experience to be a real rape and for the man to act in an odiously brutal manner, ... In any case, what very often happens in all circles and classes is for the virgin to be abruptly taken by an egoistic lover who is primarily interested in his own pleasure, or by a husband, sure of his conjugal rights, who feels insulted by his wife’s resistance and even becomes enraged if the defloration is difficult.

Furthermore, however deferential and polite the man may be, the first penetration is always a violation. Because she desires caresses on lips or breast, or even long for known or imagined pleasure more specifically sexual, what happens is that a man’s sex organ tears the young girl and penetrates into regions where it has not been desired. Many writers have described the painful surprise of a virgin, lying enchanted in the arms of lover or husband, who believes she is at last to fulfil her voluptuous dreams and who feels an unexpected pain in her secret sexual parts; her dreams vanish, her excitement fades, and love assumes the aspect of surgical operation.” (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 382-83)

However, in love the humiliation she anticipated has undergone in fact. She is over powered and forced to compliant. She is *under* the male. “From childhood on the notion of superiority and inferiority are among the most important. ... Now the woman lies in the posture of defeat; worse, the man rides her as he would an animal subject to bit and reins. She always feels passive; she is caressed, penetrated, she undergoes coition, whereas the man exerts himself actively.” (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 385)

Is there a difference?

Is woman’s sex pleasure quite different from man’s? (Beauvoir, 1989; [1949]: 395)

Sexuality, body and relation with the other, in a word, the perception of self in relation with the other – is there in each the construction of difference? Is there in their expressions “*tumi more jao*” and “*Amake arektu somoy dao*” an insurmountable and an incommensurable difference? One is goal directed and focussed; man’s focus is on the genital. In other words, the man is focussed on the pleasure of the phallus and his goal is penetration. Man’s perspective on sexuality is phallocentric; it is penetrative Eros based. This is the ‘ideal’ sexuality model to which so-called ‘normal’ people

conform to. The 'success' and 'failure' of each comes to be measured in terms of the 'ideal'. The consummation of marriage would be measured in terms of the 'ideal'. In other words, a marriage would be assessed in terms of the ideal and those who conform to this ideal is considered 'normal' and 'successful' and those who do not conform to the ideal will be branded either a 'failure' or 'abnormal'/'pathological'. The man (husband) of this situation conformed to the ideal. The woman did not; hence, she was brought to the clinic. Had I been in a non-feminist milieu, I would have treated this woman for frigidity. The feminist, especially the radical feminist perspective placed before me a number of questions;

1. Does the problem lie with the woman?
2. Or is the problem premised on the very fixing of the fixed 'ideal'? The ideal in terms of which individual man, woman, other than man and woman are all assessed.

The 'ideal' is that in terms of which marriage, relation, even love is assessed. This paper is an attempt at putting into question the very 'Idea(l)' of sexuality.

In the particular setting, I have described the very representation of sexuality by the man (husband) and the woman (Rita) was different. The difference once again shows that the ideal does not work. Our experiences of sex, sexuality and body are variegated. In particular, the experience of the man and the woman is different. The way the man viewed the self and his relation with the other is somewhat different from how the woman viewed herself in relation with the other, differences that bear to some extent the simmering of the Kohlberg-Gilligan debate⁸. In this particular case, the man was focussed on his own self, on what he had got from others (here his wife); while the woman was focussed on how she was related to others and what she could not do for others.

Nevertheless, in spite of the representation of each; in spite of the differences, there can be no denying of the fact that sexual initiation within marriage gives to woman more often than not a sense of violation.

In lieu of a conclusion: This paper has worked at the interstices of the works of Beauvoir and Irigaray. Beauvoir has been read by some as a liberal feminist. Irigaray on the other hand has been read as a critic of Beauvoir. But a close reading of the chapter Sexual Initiation (from *The Second Sex*) throw up unexpected convergences between the approach of Beauvoir and Irigaray with the invocation of the difference of woman's body and her sexuality, in a word, of 'woman' as such. Beauvoir comes close to the Irigarayan invocation of woman's difference with respect to a phallogentric and hommo-sexual⁹ Order. The use of Lacan in the space of Beauvoir and Irigaray is only to throw up the Lacanian emphasis on the subject's relation to the signifier, never to give in to the implicit phallogentricism of Freud-Lacan¹⁰.

Notes

1. The test data indicated sexual role conflict and feminine role rejection. One can put to question the very process of interpretation of test data. One can also appreciate the androcentric bias in the science of psychology in this context. The very understanding of masculine and feminine in the test situation was not different from the conventional patriarchal rendition of the same.
2. In fact in his description and in his use of language, two things were stressed, 1) his wife's virginity and 2) non-consummation of his virgin wife by him.
3. I have many friends who got married very early (gave up studying and quit their jobs) because their parents were purportedly ill.
4. Here, Freud's concept of the 'penis envy', which is believed to be resolved through the birth of a boy child, seems to play a part and dominate the thought pattern of the woman. However, whether this desire for a boy child in woman is hers or is socially constructed is a different analysis all together. Further, whether this understanding of woman flows from Freud's phallocentrism also need to be examined.
5. Among Stekel's report "...one woman suffered for years from crippling backache and frigidity, because on her wedding night the defloration was painful, and her husband accused her of deceiving him in regard to her virginity"
6. "...if you allow time for taking off clothes, making some phoney gestures of affection, having bit of banal conversation and getting dressed again, the amount of time spent actually having sex is about eleven minutes". (Coelho, 2003: 88)
7. In the Kinsey Report: "For perhaps three-quarters of all male, orgasm is reached within two minutes after the initiation of the sexual relation... females who may require ten to fifteen minutes of the most careful stimulation to bring climax..." (Beauvoir, 1989 [1949], 394)
8. In the Kohlberg-Gilligan debate, Gilligan criticized Kohlberg's theory of the (purportedly) inferior morality of women; Gilligan studied and showed that "women are concerned with their responsibilities to others, others' feelings, and the effect their behaviour has on relationships, where as men are concerned with their rights, rules, and standard of justice" (Helgeson, 2002:134).
9. A culture based on primacy of male, the homme, one who can function only with others modelled on HIM – a deep pervasive cult of sameness (Dhar, 2000: 85-86).
10. *Second Sex* by Beauvoir is a critic of Freud's phallocentrism (The Psychoanalytic Point of View: 38-52). *Speculum of the Other Woman* by Irigaray is a critic of Lacanian phallocentrism.

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Of Hope and Acceptance: A Reading of Devdutt Pattanaik's *Shikhandi And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You*

Irona Bhaduri

“To all those here, there, and in between”

-Devdutt Pattanaik

In 21st century India, when people still continue to look down upon the LGBT community, there arises a necessity to look back to a lost era of ancient myths and tales which reassert to an idea, of a way more tolerant India. The social codes of behaviour that are expected from one to all, often act as a suppressor of voices, in a sense that it dictates individuals to conduct themselves according to the so-called ‘normal’ way. Men and women are supposed to behave in a certain way as acceptable by society. Anyone who doesn’t conform to such norms of the society become ‘different’, ‘abnormal’ and the ‘other.’ This conditioning of the society we live in, actually strangulates the unheard voices who fail to talk about their sexual identities and desires. Out of this conditioning of the majority emerges marginalisation and hence the minority continue to face day-to-day challenges of social stigma, stereotyping, humiliation and desensitised behaviour. At this juncture, the challenge becomes to sensitise people about the ‘in-betweenness’ in the binaries of men and women, which is not at all ‘unnatural.’ Devdutt Pattanaik very aptly says, “Queerness questions what constitutes male and female.” (12) Mythology has always held a very significant place where cultures have often sought for reference and for that matter acceptance. The word mythology has its roots from the Greek word ‘Mythos’ and ‘logos’. Now, ‘mythos’ means ‘story of the people’ and logos refers to ‘word or speech’. So, we may say that mythology refers to a spoken story of people and their collective experiences. In his famous book *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, Herbert Jennings Rose says, “Myth is a cognitive structure analogue to language through which primitive people organize their experiences”. (39) Since mythology has mostly been transmitted from generation to generation orally, it might have undergone change. But, predominantly it has passed on an essential essence of tradition, culture intertwined with collective experience, societal models and structures, and wisdom and knowledge, about society conveying a symbolic significance of these stories or experiences. Mythology is very much a part of the ‘collective unconscious’ and so is ‘queerness’. Queerness has been a part of our society since ancient times. The ithyphallic god Min, Seth or the Turin Erotic Papyrus of the Egyptian mythology, Tu Shen (popularly known as Rabbit god) or Yue

Lao in Chinese mythology, Dionysus (the god of hermaphrodites) or Aphrodite (goddess of love, and an ally of homosexuals) in Greek mythology, *linga-purana* or *Ardhanareshwara* (Lord Shiva in the image of a phallus in a vagina representing 'in-betweeness') in Indian mythology, assert that mythology had no margins. Therefore, ancient mythological texts and folklore across the world and of India, talk of acceptance, rather than that of exclusion and marginalisation.

This area of studies is quite intriguing and therefore has been an interesting, substantial and a significant amount of work done in this area. While some have looked into interdisciplinary aspects, there are theoreticians and academicians who laid overall understanding of these studies. *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex: Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions through Hinduism* by Amara Das Wilhelm is an outstanding piece in this regard, in the sense that it opens up a critical outlook to question and rethink queerness in ancient texts of India. Lambda Literary Award-winning book, *Queering India* by Ruth Vanitha is a collection of essays on varied topics ranging from homoeroticism to Kamasutra is also worth mentioning in this context. Coming to the loci of the discussion, the book *Shikhandi And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You*, retells the stories of ancient Indian mythology, in a way that helps in understanding the dynamics of sexuality. This book by Devdutt Pattanaik is an outcome of the author's long-term engagement to understand and reinterpret mythology in the contemporary scenario. Pattanaik basically opens up the closet of what is not merely fiction but factions of mythological texts. The book focuses on the celebration of normality in being any sexual identity, unlike how the various sexual identities in today's India are torn between taboos and societal expectations. Pattanaik's immense interest and research in mythology, spanning over nearly two decades, demonstrates how mythology is more accepting in terms of gender performativity, and how it rejects finite boundaries of femininity and masculinity. This book illustrates different stories proclaiming that ancient Indian society was comfortable with the idea of 'queerness.' The author attempts to retell these stories from ancient Indian mythology and literature which intends to break the shackles of intimidation. This book is a unique blend of stories, cultural practices, and the concepts associated with each story. The appeal of this book lies in its detailed and clear conceptions about a eunuch, transsexual, transvestite, transgender, intersexed hermaphrodite, homosexuals, effeminate men, etc. many a time, it so happens that the whole notion about the LGBT community, gets generalised and Pattanaik very diligently attempts to tear apart this generalised perspective and celebrates the uniqueness of each story. Pattanaik locates this book in a bygone era, where heterosexual relationships co-existed with homosexual relationships, rather comfortably without degrees of concealment and compartmentalisation.

The book comes in two segments. Part I primarily introduces the readers to the

idea of queerness, thereby appreciating every diverse aspect of it. This segment also sets the tone of rich diversity present in mythology which gradually subverts the hetero-normative narratives. Part II comprises of the retelling of stories from varied sources such as mythology, epics, folklore, *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Shaiva Agamas*, *Nava-Nava-Charitra*, *Puranas*, *Bhagwata Puranas*, *Skanda Puranas*, *Purananuru* (ancient collection Tamil Poems dating 1000 BCE to 300 CE and oral traditions of Bengal, Gangetic Plains, Hijras, Vraj, and Tamil Temple Lore. He begins his book by tracing back the origin of queerness in Indian mythology and comparing queerness in other ancient mythologies such as Mesopotamian, Aztec, Viking, Egyptian, Japanese Shinto, Persian, etc. He gives his perspective on certain terms and concepts which become essential in understanding the book better. To begin with, Pattanaik talks about ‘symbols’ and how symbols generate meaning in the cultural context of communities. He further explains how these symbols are prone to change in meaning, and open to interpretation through time. Secondly, he says that mythology is nothing but a “study of people’s subjective truth expressed in stories, symbols and rituals.” (Pattanaik 35) Pattanaik lays stress on the task of the interpreter. While interpreting, the interpreter’s beliefs also play an important role in not only performing the task of interpretation but also while the interpreter himself receives the knowledge. He further talks of traditional Indian Thought which is based on the ideologies of *karma*, attainment of absolute truth (*param satya*), everyone is unique (*pratyeka adwitiyam*), etc. Given all the premises, towards the end of Part I, Pattanaik inclines towards a subaltern approach to the idea of queerness, emphasizing on the fact that this community should refuse to conform, stay invisible and be silent to the bizarre ways of this world. Pattanaik ends Part I by saying that this book retells the stories “to challenge the popular notions of normality” (34) and begins Part II with a beautiful stanza:

All things queer are not sexual
 All things sexual are not reproductive
 All things reproductive are not romantic
 All things romantic are not queerless (Pattanaik 37)

There are around thirty stories in the book from varied mythological sources as mentioned earlier. The collection opens with the most prominent one being the tale of *Shikhandi* from Mahabharata, after which the book is titled. Reborn as Dhruvada’s daughter but raised as a man, Shikhandi was Amba, born as well as raised a woman in her previous life. Amba wanted to avenge the wrong done to her by Bhishma when he had abducted her along with her sisters from their *swayamvara* for his half-brother, Vichitravirya. On the request of Amba, Vichitravirya had set her free to marry the one she wanted to. On hearing the story of abduction, Shalva refused to accept her. She came back to Vichitravirya but he refused. She sought refuge from Bhishma, but Bhishma had already taken the vow of celibacy. Amba later jumped into the fire, and

with great penance, she was blessed by Shiva that she would be the cause of Bhishma's death in her next life. In her next life, she was born to Dhrupada, as a girl, but Dhrupada wanted a male child hence he raised Shikhandi as a male. Years later, on the wedding night, it came out that Shikhandi was not a male. Shikhandi's wife left for her father's King Hiranyavarna's home. Facing this humiliation and her new-found sexuality Shikhandi went to the forest to kill herself. Sthuna, a *yaksha* saved her life. In order to prove masculinity, Shikhandi even had to borrow manhood or explicitly saying, male genital from Sthuna, for a day. With this, Shikhandi proved her male sexuality to the courtesans sent by King Hiranyavarna. On hearing a positive report, King Hiranyavarna sent back his daughter, and they consummated their marriage. Shikhandi, later went to Kubera, the king of *yakshas* to return her masculinity. Kubera was so pleased by this gesture that he presented this manhood to Shikhandi and told her that whenever she wished she could use it. During the battle in *Mahabharata*, Shikhandi, or rather the soul of Amba seeks revenge from Bhishma, as she is a man and a woman in the same body, and thus she could enter the battlefield. There is a constant dichotomy of sex and gender. And as we all know, sex is a biological construct, whereas gender is a social construct. A question that comes up here is that, with the new-found sexuality how is Shikhandi to be referred? 'She' or a 'he?' This further questions the incapability of language to address an indeterminate gender or a transsexual. This also critically raises the point of inclusivity of gender-neutral language in our discourse. Now during the battle in *Mahabharata*, Shikhandi seeks revenge from Bhishma, for the wrong done to her in the past life. As she is man and woman in the same body, she could enter the battlefield. Here the story beautifully evokes a tone of gender 'fluidity' that Eve Sedgwick talks of in his monumental work *Epistemology of the Closet*. The author aptly points out the hypocrisy and the underlying patriarchy in portraying Shikhandi as a eunuch, or a man who feels like a woman, wherein the reality is Shikhandi is a transsexual. Moreover, sexuality was never a taboo in Indian society. The erraticism in sexuality made the honchos of society to set certain rules, which in course of time became taboos. Thus, began the marginalisation and preaching of empty values of morality.

The other stories are equally nerve tickling. The tales "Mahadeva...", "Vishnu...", "Kali...", "Gopeshwar...", "Aravan...", and "Aruna..." are about the change of gender and gender fluidity. Strikingly, the story "Vishnu..." points out how women are objectified as the seductress. The tales "Chudala..." and "Samavan..." both point out the patriarchy in society in different ways. In the former story, Chudala's husband Shikhandhivaja, was in search of knowledge and "sought wisdom." (Pattanaik 54) Though his wife was a wise *yogini*, he didn't consider her wisdom, since she was a woman, hence she was stamped irrational and docile. Learning upon this, she transforms herself into a man, as Kumbhaka, a hermit. Shikhandhivaja, not knowing this, becomes receptive

to the knowledge imparted by Kumbhaka, a man. Later on, when Chudala reveals that it was her, Shikhidhvaja realises that gender does not limit anyone's knowledge or wisdom. This shows how women are regarded as less intelligent and competent than men, and to prove one's wisdom or intellect one has to portray oneself as a male. This tale questions the stereotyped projection of a woman which reduces her to be only a "sexual object or a procreating device." (Nayar 83) In the latter story "Samavan...", Samavan disguised himself as the wife of Sumedhas, his friend to obtain gifts from a queen named Simantini. Such was her devotion that Samavan transformed into a woman. To this, Samavan's father, "moaned the loss of a son." (Pattanaik 72) This tale portrays the society's preference of a male child and how a male child is more precious and of worth than a female child. The result of this is selective female infanticide which continues even this day. This tale further evokes a question in the minds of readers that whether the changed gender of Samavan to Samavati, change the sexual and gender hierarchical dynamics between the two friends.

In the story of "Madhata...", Yuvanashva, a man gives birth to a child and Pattanaik raises a critical question here; "if a man uses medical science to bear a child and lactate, how would 'modern' society treat him?" (81) The tale, "Bhangashvana..." has the same theme as the previous one and also Bhangashava is cursed into a woman. This raises an extremely poignant question – is being a woman, a curse? Later, when being asked about which gender would he prefer to be, he said he would rather be a woman since women enjoy more sexual pleasure than men. Sexual desire has been something that women cannot freely talk of and in doing so, they can be subjected to shaming and also labelled on their character. Interestingly, in this story, Bhangashava talks of sexuality and sexual pleasure enjoyed by women, but that happens because, initially he was a man; and, that, had he been a woman in the first place, would he still be able to freely express his sexual desires? Moreover, in today's context, Bhangashava's character can be seen as a bisexual. Thus, again asserting that Indian society was not only open about coitus but also about sexual pleasure. In the stories of "Ratnavali..." and "Urvashi...", tones of homosexuality can be traced between the inseparable friendship of Ratnavali and Brahmini, and Nara and Narayana. It is to be noted here that, Urvashi is born out of Narayana, a male, which again resonates the story of Yuvanashva. In the case of Ratnavali and Brahmini, Adrienne Rich's 'lesbian continuum' can be applied in the sense that there is a certain kind of camaraderie that bonds them up and this companionship might not be sexual in nature. "Bhagirath..." has strong undertones of homosexuality, where one woman approaches the other woman in a masculine way in a sexual relationship without any gender change. The tale of "Skanda..." can be associated with the modern-day surrogacy and frozen zygote transplant.

The tale "Arjuna..." is about Arjuna being a eunuch and transvestite dancer,

named Brihanalla in the final year of exile serving a curse made to him by Urvashi. Arjuna was cursed because he had refused to make love to Urvashi, as she has been the beloved of both Puruvara, the predecessor of Arjuna, and Indra, Arjuna's father. This makes Urvashi a motherly figure and thus, this would have been some sort of an incestuous relationship. This tale also raises issues of female sexual desires boldly and the fact that though being criticised on being vocal about her sexual desires, Urvashi expresses it. The theme of transvestism is recurrent. In the tale of "Bhima...", Bhima cross-dresses as Draupadi to punish Kichaka for his lust. The tale "Vijaya..." is again around Krishna and Arjuna cross-dressing to procure sacred objects. There are recurrent tales on Krishna's cross-dressing to make love throughout ancient folktales, which again asserts on the acceptability of not being normative. In "Samba...", the story again revolves around cross-dressing. The tale "Indra..." is about Indra's disguise as a hermit and making love to Ahalya, who is already married to Gautama. Infuriated Gautama castrates Indra. This is a mythological tale that speaks about infidelity, castration and moral code. Pattanaik raises a significant aspect of this story, that over the years Ahalya has been subjected to all the emphasis on infidelity and 'character', whereas, if pondered, it is Indra who is to be blamed. To this day, morality has been one of the key cultural roles that are demanded from a woman, but when it comes to questioning the morality of men, for instance, there will be perpetual inequality. The story "Ila..." (Sudymna as male) who is an indeterminate gender marries Boodh, Lord of the planet Mercury, another indeterminate gender. This tale becomes a pertinent example of free marriage and consensual coitus amongst the queer and sets an example of 'acceptance' which probably today's society lacks.

The story of "Baluchara..." raises the issues of a hijra. In today's context as well, "their existence expresses the urgent need of a new prism of gender to develop new perspectives about sex and gender, and to understand their respective roles in society." (Arora 1) This tale also resonates with the present-day phenomenon of forceful marriages of queer individuals to heterosexuals in the name of society and procreation. Hijras or the third gender "were deemed 'criminal tribe' during British Raj." (Pattanaik 108) Recent research is pointing out that this marginalisation and 'othering' is purely an aftermath of colonisation. The ancient texts show "the inclusive culture of India, in terms of sexuality and gender, before the colonial authorities barged into the country." (Tiwari 19) The hijra community particularly have been gravely marginalised, cruelly discriminated and humongously stereotyped for their sexuality. In this context, Gilbert Herdt's book *Third Sex, Third Gender* becomes extremely relevant which talks about the binary constructs of sexual orientation.

The last tale sets an optimistic tone of inclusion and closure to the book. It leaves the reader in a hope that someday 'Ram-Rajya' as it is often referred, would actually come into being. Ram, who is the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, was leaving

Ayodhya for fourteen years of exile. He saw his countrymen following him on his exile. So, he asked the men, women and children to return home and that, he will carry out his father's orders. On his return from exile, he saw a group of people waiting by the riverside. On questioning, one of them replied saying that Ram instructed men, women and children to go back and that, they were neither of them. Moved with this gesture, Ram says that he will include everyone in his kingdom with equality as he blessed the hijras by saying "never again shall you be invisible" and granted them a boon. (Pattanaik 173) To this day, hijras' blessings are sought after childbirth. Pattanaik, here, hints on a 'Promised Land' of inclusivity. Taking the trail, from our folklores, there arises a necessity to unearth and address the issues and questions the differential treatment that these marginalised sections of the society go through.

Years of struggle has opened the closed doors for the LGBT community with the decriminalisation of Section 377 under Indian Penal Code. Let alone the social stigma, Supreme court, the country's apex body of justice had banned homosexual marriages in India, way back in 2013. Hence, the saying, 'justice delayed is justice denied,' was on the verge of being proven. Laws should not only be in pages, but we as individuals and citizens of the world, should join hands to provide the marginalised a scope to live a 'normal' and peaceful life, free of social subjugation through stereotyping and glares, so that all can co-exist in harmony. The decriminalisation of Section 377 which came out in September 6th, 2018, has initiated a discourse and also enabled many individuals to come out and talk about their sexualities openly without any fear, facilitating a change. The Pride Marches post the verdict; indicate a joyous waving rainbow flag. In *Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India*, Prof. R. Raj Rao, probably India's first gay theorist, makes a bold and phenomenal attempt to discuss the challenges faced by homosexuals and challenges issues of homophobia in India, giving accounts of lived experiences of these individuals. From no laws to protect the rights of these marginalised sections of the society, to laws on paper, to laws being implemented, Indian society is somewhat moving towards acceptance. In this regard, it is necessary to raise the question of the hijras, the most oppressed 'outcasts.' A milestone judgement was passed by the Supreme court in 2014 by legally giving recognition as the third gender. Hereafter, many of them are striving to be educated and some of them are also applying for jobs. The third gender needs special attention for their social upliftment with a particular focus on medication on their sexual issues and also awareness about HIV, syphilis, human papillomavirus infection, genital herpes, STD, etc. Education is another factor which can facilitate their upliftment and also encourage them to come out of their ghettos, earn a decent livelihood other than being sex-workers or begging in the streets. A. Revathi's memoir *The Truth About Me* unapologetically and scathingly comments "on the pre-defined social order/norms and dares to barge in the comfortable zone of the binary set-up." (Arora 6) She not

only throws light on this ostracised section of the society but also delves deep into the unimaginable psychological aspect of the journey she took to transform herself biologically. Another seminal work in this regard is Serena Nanda's *Neither Man nor Woman*. These works are actually pathbreaking in the sense that they not only speak volumes about an erstwhile silenced community but also dare to provide a platform for others to be vocal about their sexuality and identity. With these testimonies, these marginalised sections are, "struggling against all the humiliations... that the conscious ears would love to hear." (Arora 18) Moreover, K. Prithika Yashini, India's first transgender police officer from Tamil Nadu, **Madhu Bai Kinnar, India's first transgender mayor of India from Chattishgarh, Manabi Bandyopadhyay, India's first transgender principal of a college in West Bengal, social activists- Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi, Kalki Subramaniam and Gauri Sawant, and Apsara Reddy, a journalist and public speaker, have broken all shackles to bring about changes in their own ways. It is for us to take the trail if not the lead and create a holistic place to dwell in.**

To conclude, the book *Shikhandi And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You*, subverts the stereotyped imaging of the *tritiya-pakriti* as the 'other.' The wide-ranging collection of stories significantly captures the core of ancient Indian society's approach to queerness and sexuality. The stories, very interestingly do not look down upon any of the sexualities, relationships or genders, which show that ancient Indian society must have been open enough to take things as they are and not just label and condemn for the sake of it. Not only the ancient mythological texts, but the Indian sculptures of Khajuraho also have extraordinary engravings of homoeroticism. The book demystifies bashfulness often associated with sexual behaviour, attitude and desires, rather establishes the fact that Indian society was far from being coy about it. Judith Butler's concept of 'gender performativity' can be traced in many of these stories where these 'role' becomes "open to negotiation and alteration" unlike in today's times. (Nayar 91) Mythology is a vast treasure house, and thus holds possibilities for researchers to explore vistas of not only gender studies but also religious, comparative, cultural and psychoanalytical studies. In the fight for greater acceptance of the LGBT community in India, this book is indeed an honest attempt to locate instances of acceptance in ancient Indian mythology. The book also highlights the fact that homosexuality or for that matter queerness, in general, is not something modern or a western phenomenon. Ancient Indian texts and oral traditions have innumerable references of queerness which time has somehow forgotten. Exploring, explaining and establishing the power of myth, Pattanaik rightly challenges patriarchal society's approach towards this compartmentalisation of sexualities, which somehow fails to accept the fluidity between the sexualities. The most fascinating and thought-provoking parts of the book are the illustrations, notes which not only connect the readers to their

roots but also inculcate a critical eye to look at the 'queer question' that precede and follow every chapter and story. This authenticates Pattanaik's attempt of revisiting mythology. The stories strike the darker shades and provoke to "question all that makes us uncomfortable." (Pattanaik 32) This book emphatically questions the politics of exclusion and sincerely attempts to move beyond the margins, and towards acceptance and assimilation.

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Pull between the Natural and the Forced: Reading into the Portrayal of Power and Sexuality in Tagore's *Chitrangada*

Sanghita Sanyal

“Bodies become gendered through the continuous performance of gender. Hence gender, rather than being a part of our inner essence, is performative; to be feminine is to perform femininity” (Jackson, 137)

The observation has a different context, but it becomes a wide-angled, generic comment upon the tendency of identifying the sexuality of a human being, which is subjective and based on a series of constructs on the personal, domestic space as well as on the wider social ambit. I take this as a reference point to read into the state of Chitrangada, as portrayed in Rabindranath Tagore's eponymous dance drama. Interestingly, Chitrangada becomes an archetypal figure of (alternate) sexual mis-/identity, characteristic androgynous tendencies and desire. Through the twentieth century pedagogic and academic studies precisely with Tagore's portrayal of Chitrangada exemplifies self-realization among human beings through social/gender performance. We would seek to take a closer look at the most evocative of Tagore's musicals – *Chitrangada* and thereby read into it a complex feminist trajectory that obviously stems from the plot.

We do not get an evidence of any academic or pedagogic activity related to Chitrangada prior to Tagore's play and it leaves us free to claim that Tagore's Chitrangada actually addresses a very important question of sexuality-social image-marriage-love and desire as they are perceived, interconnected with the whole affair of a “healthy” man-woman relationship in the social tapestry.

Tagore lifts Chitrangada from the pages of the *Mahabharata* to make the protagonist of his musical, by the same name. By making a play entirely based on the portrayal of Chitrangada is itself interesting. That is because, Chitrangada as Arjun's love interest in Manipur, is a rather minor character in the *Mahabharata*, except for the fact that she is the mother of Aravan, Arjun's son, who plays a very quaintly crucial role in the Kurukshetra war, at a particular point. Tagore weaves a tale around this dis-/order of sexuality and builds it up not just through the plot but even through the rhetorics the play, be it the songs or the dialogues. Tagore's portrayal of Chitrangada brings to light a story which, in its own rights, becomes significant, not just in terms of

the bigger picture of the *Mahabharata* but also becomes a critical peek into the far bigger picture of Indian/Hindu perception of alternate/sexuality as the only essential issue in man-woman relationship, through time.

In the entire play the pendulum of gender-ideals keeps swinging back and forth. Chitrangada becomes a very subtle subversion of sexuality and its social baggage, not just through the narrative/plot but is also highlighted and reinforced by Tagore's images, diction and symbolism. A basic (albeit sketchy) outline of the play's plot movement needs to be mentioned here.

Gratified with the devoutness of Manipur-Raj (The King of Manipur), Lord Shiva had blessed him with a boon that there would only sons be born in his clan. But despite this (oracle) when Chitrangada was born to the royal family, the king raised her as a son. The princess practised archery, learnt the art of warfare and administrative policies.

The play then moves into a narration in overture, which renders a very interesting angle to the entire narrative of sexuality – "*Mohini maya elo/ Elo joubonokunjobone / Elo hridayoshikare, ...shorbonasher berajal beshtito charidhare / ...aano, aano mukti aano — Chholonar bondhon chhedi / Esho Pourush-uddhare*" (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 147)

[The lovelorn-magic wafted into the garden of youth, to win the heart, ...wove a web of foreboding all around... Bring about freedom; tear off the restraint of deception, come to save masculinity.]

The lines are like an invocation to Arjun, the bravest of the brave, the saintly warrior, who would come to free a soul of its limitations and save mankind, masculinity. This becomes a rather convoluted handling of the entire issue of gender. Tagore anticipates Arjun as the saviour of mankind (read: saviour of masculinity) from the deceptive domains of sexual performance and implores him to free that soul that is sojourning in the illusory performance of what it is not, in reality.

Immediately after this narration, the play opens with a scene that sets the tone of the narration, where Chitrangada goes for a hunting expedition with a group of female companions. But Tagore keeps rupturing every stereotype, yet reinforces gender conformity very subtly immediately afterwards or parallel, which leaves us baffled at his interplay of images and tropes and the apparent inconclusiveness of any gender-centric absolute standpoint.

Chitrangada performs masculinity and thus becomes masculine, but Arjun falls in love with her, and makes way for blooming of a romantic emotion within her, which leads Chitrangada to question her own self. She herself faces a rift within, between her social (masculine) self and her inner (sexual) self that responds to Arjun's love. She then wants to 'perform femininity' and become a true, real woman, within the

context of conjugality.

Tagore's heroine then, takes off a transformation that is not just emotional but psycho-social, in the sense, she "decides" to change because she feels a change and this leads to various questions rising over her earlier self, and her later self, which one is more natural and conforming to nature than social orientation. It is here that Chitragada faces a pull between the natural and the forced – between her psychosexual womanly self, that is natural yet not performative, and her acquired masculine self, that may be forced by performance and real yet not acceptable socially at a wider context. The question that gets raised in the process is centering around performance itself: is performance bringing out the natural or is performance capable of layering the natural self into an alternative scope of mis-/identity? How far socially acceptable would that effect of performance be? Chitragada's Kurupa self (loosely translated as 'not-so-beautiful' or even 'ugly') thrives on bravado but as soon as the emotion of love for Arjun the bravest of brave dawns on her, she transforms into *Surupa* (beautiful). Her perspective towards life changes as she sings -

*"De tora amaye, nutono kore de nutono abhorone
***boshonte hok doinyo bimochan
Nobo labonyo dhoneshunyo shakha lojja bhulejak
Pollobo aborone"* (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 151)

[“Turn me, you all, into a new being, with newness of ornaments... let the springtime shed all that is gloomy, and bring about the new beauty, let the bare branches be clad, and cover it's infamy with the new leaves”].

This song, underlining the symbolic import of change and newness, somewhere makes Chitragada conform to the patriarchal norms, which gives us a peek straightaway into Tagore's personal feminist ideology and his perspectives towards alternative sexuality, and the social concepts of “gender”, as the play has started addressing in the current trends of studies. Was Tagore trying to raise an issue of alternative sexuality and its literary implications and Chitragada was in the way of becoming a major step into that trend?

Tagore's Chitragada is eventually a rather sexualized portrayal who finally conforms. But my argument is that if we look closely then we find Tagore making very subtle departures and with his words is actually rupturing the set up. Though Chitragada seems to be conforming, but Tagore also uses her as a ploy to cut through the Hindu traditional perception of desire and marriage and rests his modern outlook for us readers to screen out through his very emblematically presented plot and its inherent rhetoric of sexuality. Under the superficial layer of interpretation, what we see is Chitragada's agency as having power: in more ways than one – first, she has the power to choose her sexual/social preference and she exhibits it through not just

being a sporty, hunter but also in her being a valourous warrior and the protectorate of her kingdom. Second, Chitrangada redressed the question of power by finally rejecting the masculinist value and retaining her fluid sexual self that is rather androgynous in its performance and thus transgressive in her representation.

That leaves us to reflect upon Tagore's own ideals and opinions about gender identity in general from which we could enter the text of *Chitrangada*. The irony to be noted here is that Chitrangada's hunting expedition is in keeping with her masculine habits and training, yet her companions are all women who, in most or all dramatic performances, are presented to be cross-dressed as men. With the foreword already ringing in the mind, this whole affair of feminine self and masculine performance or behaviour opens up a whole new trajectory of gender-bending identity. Also it points at Tagore's incongruity of ideas and subtle conformity. He depicts Chitrangada as a woman who is performing masculine activities, because, she is yet to discover her true self (read: sexuality) and it is predictably obvious that Arjun would "facilitate her" (sexual) awakening. This whole discourse of self-actualization and self discovery in terms of sexuality and eventual social role-play, are presented mostly through the trope of old clothes being torn off to wear a new one, be it in songs or in the dialogues. The image of a garb, an outer covering being removed to bring forth the real, is well noticed and together runs another image of the old being replaced by the new. To be more explicit, Tagore presents Chitrangada as to desire the covering of masculinity to shed and the real womanly, feminine come out. Yet somewhere we are tempted to read into the same lines as an undercurrent of Tagore's plea or objective to raise a subject that is completely new in its time -alternating sexual identity with its performance.

Initially, as Chitrangada and her companions of the hunting expedition is considered as a band of young boys, engaged in hunting sport, Chitrangada's somewhat masculinist ego or self-identification is lit up – she recognizes Arjun as the warrior and expresses her desire to be invited in a duel, a fight and says, "*Kshama diye korona oshomman,/ Juddhe koro ahoban!/Beer-hate mrityur gourab/kori jeno onubhab...*" (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 148)

[Pardon and sympathetic respite would be a shame, call me into a fight, let me feel the glory of dying in the hands of a warrior.]

Eventually Chitrangada falls in love with Arjun, which is an obvious portrayal of the natural process over which none has a control on and which becomes the decisive cause or reason for Chitrangada's desire to transform –from the constructed self to the natural reality. Chitrangada, so long, growing up with masculine habits now changes overnight in her emotional make up which is reflected in the performances and also in the play by changing her fashion. Her state is well defined by the words of her

companions, “*ekpoloker aaghatei/khoshilo ki apon puraton o porichoy*” (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 148)

[A momentary blow has pulled down the old self]

Chitrangada realizes her own sexual self. It is eloquently contained in the song she becomes an iconic expression of self-realisation with the emotion of love – “*b(n)odhu, kon aalo laglo chokhe!*” (What a light is cast on my eyes!)

As Chitrangada utters more –

“*Asfuto manjari kunjobone/sangeeta shunyo bishonno mone/shongirikto chirodukkho raati / pohabo ki nirjone shoyono paati!*”. (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 149)

A loose translation of the lines would be, “the garden is full of buds yet to bloom, that lay dejected without thy music, shall I live the friendless night, in the dark, lonely bed?” We find the poet in his song associating her realization with her fear of loneliness in her whole life. Is it not a kind of subtle trick on the part of the poet to plant the feminine idea of companionship blooming with the realization of sexuality?

The most obvious masculinist underpinning of Tagore’s ideas come with Chitrangada, no more cross-dressing as a prince, now turns *Surupa* or the beautiful. It is ironic, that a woman with masculine preferences, is necessarily considered *Kurupa* or the unattractive, while the same woman when changes her clothing and preferences, turns beautiful. As Arjun rejects Chitrangada’s love, with the plea of being a vowed sage, the princess becomes more violent in her expressions of dejection. She rues about her psycho-social garb of masculinity as she says, “*Haye, Haye, narire korechhi byartha/dirgho kaal jibone amar/dhik dhonushwor!/Dhik Bahubol!/Muhurtero srubonyabege/ bhashaye dilo je mor pourush shadhona...*” (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 151)

[I have failed the woman in me, for years in my life. What is this bow! What is this strength! The moment’s surge of tears washed away my lifelong entreaty of masculine glory!]

Subsequently, Chitrangada goes to seek the blessings of Madan, (a Hindu parallel for Eros, the God of Love), and explains: “*purushero bidya korechhinu shiksha/ lobhinai/ mono horonero diksha...*” (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 153)

[I had learnt the art of the masculine, and never learnt the ways of love, to win the heart.] Chitrangada is split within herself. She feels at home with both her feminine self, in love with Arjun, and feels at home with her masculine capabilities, but now regrets at the spur of the moment, as she has learnt the social one-sidedness of consideration. Women must be capable of attracting and evoking passion within the

man's heart – that is her only essence. And she feels troubled. She embodies what Tagore perhaps tries to ideate in his essay “Woman and Home” under the broad title *Creative Unity*. Borrowing Tagore's own words here, we could say, “[I]n the present case, the wrong is in woman's lack of freedom in her relationship with man, which compels her to turn her disabilities into attractions, and to use untruths as her allies in the battle of life, while she is suffering from the precariousness of her position.” (Tagore, *English Writings*, 553) The words, instantly give us another handle, Tagore very subtly makes the woman feminine with her ability to love. The more she can love the more feminine would she be. Her masculinist behaviour is an impediment to her emotions because it is natural of men to be less emotional. This emotionally charged Chitrangada becomes the icon of all feminine qualities, notably, tearful and simultaneously thus, she is losing her masculine virtue also.

*Kothin pashane kemone gopone chhilo, / shohosha
jhorna / namilo asrudhala* (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 151)

The stones so long hiding the springing stream, have suddenly started shedding the tears in torrents, would be a simple translation of the lines which Chitrangada's companions observe in her, as a symbol of her transformation. She cries and pines for her love, and thus proves to be feminine. But at the same time, in the light of Tagore's opinion in his essay we can project Chitrangada to be that woman essentially, who is repressing her true self and suffering the indirect and self-inflicted exile of social image and the irony is that both are truths that she could live simultaneously. It is a social prerequisite that she has to chose any one and the other self would be rejected automatically.

Now Chitrangada is her beautiful *Surupaself*, and Arjun is smitten instantly by her grace and splendour. He is lost of his saintly vows and presents his warrior identity and his typically *Kshatriya* warrior value of wooing the most beautiful of women, which is a feature of his masculine glory, to possess Chitrangada as his companion. Chitrangada replies with an equivocation, ironically embodying the ambivalence that encapsulates her whole life and performance. She says—“*Nari e je mayamoyee —/ pinjore rochibe ki/ e morochikar *** lojja, lojja. Haye e kilojja —/ mithya roop more,/mithya sojjya*” (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 156)

Chitrangada says, “This woman is deceptive, will you thrive with this mirage in a cage?*** Shame, shame, what a shame it is, what a false beauty is this, and fake my adornment!

These lines were spoken by Chitrangada who is truthful to herself. She is still carrying her true self of warrior ideals and values and is still torn between her sexual self and her emotional self which is more attached to her otherwise masculine activities. She tries to convince Arjun of her true self, but Arjun, by this time, is so enamoured by

her beauty, and is impatient for a communion that he does not consider the underlying significance of her words and keeps praising her beauty to which finally Chitrangada cannot devote herself completely and exits saying –“*se ami je ami noi, ami noi*” — (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 157) [That is not me, I am not the one —]

As the plot progresses like this, Tagore seems to reinforce the fact that performance is separate from the self to a great extent and Chitrangada’s true identification is with her masculine activities and previous self, than her natural sexuality. She is a unique combination of being a woman (physically-sexually) with regular womanly characteristics and desires, yet her emotional identification is more with her masculine self which is manifested in her mundane life, since her birth. Chitrangada still tries to go back to Arjun and lead a conjugal life, when suddenly there is an attack on the village, a rampage by the dacoits. The helpless villagers in their usual chorus, calls out for “Chitrangada, their savior, forever!”. Chitrangada, since her birth, has always been used to this identity, as the protectorate of her people, an identity which is carved more on the masculine flavour. But Arjun had never thought in his wildest dream of this aspect of his beloved, which he identifies as that of a warrior. Tagore makes this the most evocative phase of the whole play as far as the gender-bias is taken into consideration. As Arjun bellows: “*Nari! Tini Nari!*” [Woman! She is a woman!] (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 159).

Obviously Arjun means that a woman is just cannot be imagined to be anything that can both be a woman and brave. Women can be accepted as either brave or a woman, that is just because being brave and independent is not accepted as a woman’s “feminine” characteristics, and conversely, if a woman happens to be spirited enough to step into such so called masculine domain, then they are “unsexed” and “unwomanly” and thus “unfit” to be loved or being loved by. Tagore, with such minimalistic usage of words and expressions make the social duplicity quite stark. But these apparent conformities, in my opinion, have a very delicate string of serious derision and Tagore’s constant swinging back and forth into derision and conformity feels somewhat like a confusion within the playwright himself, as if an inability to take a stand or rather, a middle-path where he can fit his view as sensitive to the case. He then lifts Chitrangada up above all gendered controversies and puts her on a high pedestal of a quintessential protector, and it is interestingly abided in the two images of a mother and a warrior/king. When it comes to protection and nurturing, no identity can supercede that of a mother and a king and Chitrangada is seen as impersonating both – as the villagers revere her as “*snehobole tini mata,/ bahu bole tini raja/ t(n)ar name bheribaja,/ joy joy joy bolo bhai re —/bhoy nai, bhoy nai, nai re...*” (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 159)

A simple, literal translation of the lines would be, she is the mother with her love, in strength she is the king. Blow the bugle, hail the victorious, there is nothing to fear.

However, Tagore, does, typically try to take a very feministic stand with Chitrangada's own dilemma and tendency to gravitate and incline more towards her masculine self, than her feminine naturalness.

Chitrangada becomes a unique blend – of naturalness and acquired performativity. Ironically, she is born a woman, but behaves like a man (in her choice and preferences of activities) yet, when she falls in love, she is behaving “normatively” and falls in love with a man (and not a woman) which obviously excludes her place from the category of fluid sexuality but she does tread into the space of gender-fluidity only because of her masculine sports and ability to rule and protect her land and her people. And Tagore uses this entire discourse of a rift and contradiction between natural gender conformity through an emotional feeling in the form of love, and a gender-bending subversive act through another circumstantial and emotional feeling in the form of hunting and fighting, both are equally lived realities for Chitrangada.

Then who is Chitrangada, actually? She, I feel, is both. She, as a modern reader or spectator would interpret, is a natural blend of both, not just in her role play, but her performativity will give rise to the advent of both male and female sexuality in her and this androgynous identity makes herself most complete by all socio-psycho-emotional standards. Rather could we also say, Chitrangada is a steady step into Tagore's vision of an androgynous mind that lives both the sexes essentially? She is both a man and a woman, in her feelings as well as actions. In the essay “Woman and Home” he says,

“...if woman begins to believe that, though biologically her function is different from that of man, psychologically she is identical with him; if the human world in its mentality becomes exclusively male, then before long it will be reduced to utter inanity. For life finds its truth and beauty, not in any exaggeration of sameness, but in harmony.” (Tagore, *English Writings*, 552).

Thus we could justify Chitrangada to have both the powers of the male and the female within herself, that empowers her with not destructive sexlessness, but a space of both, where she is essentially incarnating as a third type, better in every respect because she has the power of both the sexes. Chitrangada wields an autonomy which can be defined as “the capacity to manipulate one's personal environment and the ability –technical, social and psychological – to obtain... the basis for making decisions about one's private concerns...”. (Kumar, 127) Though Chitrangada is seen to be in dilemma, yet after a point she resolves her dualism and emerges victorious to assert her preference. Chitrangada attempts to step far out of the line and it becomes an individualistic attempt “to ameliorate ... situation within the system, rather than confrontational insubordination that challenges the very basis of the system. Generally,

women's resistance is severely channeled by the structures in which women are located" (Kumar, 162) but Chitrangada tries to break free through a journey of sexual initiation and then realization and perpetuation, thus turning Tagore's text into a subtle tale of coordinated resistance.

On a side view, Chitrangada who upheld androgynous identity is not a stray example in the entire *Mahabharat* which has a few more examples that express an approval of this possibility of a sexual coexistence in one body. If we think of Arjun himself, who introduces himself as Brihannala, in King Birat's court, who successfully hold his forte as a woman amidst all women in the antechambers of the palace and is still retaining his male self parallel.

We also have two more of such examples, though they become a little far-fetched due to Fate and divinity's intervention into the events. One is Shikhandi, who is Amba in her previous life, now born as a prince, but retaining his memory of being a woman and this memory is not just a memory like clairvoyance, but he retains his emotion of vengeance which he is destined to execute in this life. Another example is the subplot of Aravan, during the Kurukshetra war. Aravan, is incidentally Chitrangada's son, with Arjun. Aravan agrees to be offered as a sacrifice for victory in the battle on condition that he is married and leads conjugality before that. When no father is willing to give his daughter to marry Aravan, because of obvious widowhood awaited, Krishna himself agrees and takes the form of Mohini, who is married to Aravan for a day and a night of conjugality, and the next day, when Aravan is dead, Mohini performs a natural mourning typical of a newly widowed young woman; Krishna, however, goes back to his masculine self, soon after this mourning which is ritualistic as much natural as it has been - this only reinforces the possibility of an identity that is dual in sexuality just through their respective performance.

If not a conclusion, but an inference can be drawn that alternating sexuality has been a part of the central discourse in the *Mahabharata* and Tagore lifts up the instance of Chitrangada in order to underline his proto-feminist ideology. Tagore is oscillating constantly between his feminist establishment of sexuality beyond social, yet portrays both Arjun and Chitrangada on the basis of the heteronormative image of the masculine and the feminine.

Further, as the villagers look for Chitrangada as their saviour and Arjun encounters the true self of Chitrangada, which is a celebration of warrior ideals beyond sexuality, somewhere we see Tagore's words are weaving a feminist image of the iconic masculine Arjun. Arjun is seen to be contemplating how warrior-princess Chitrangada must be, and fancies her company. "*shuni snehe se nari, / beerje se purush...*" [I hear she is a woman when she loves and a man in her valour.] (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 160)

This portraiture is clearly of not just a transvestite but that of a transgender. Individuals who identify with the role that is the opposite of their biological sex are called transgendered. Transgendered males, for example, have such a strong emotional and psychological connection to the feminine aspects of society that they identify their gender as female. The parallel connection to masculinity exists for transgendered females. (Little, Chapter 12)

Does it give us inkling that Arjun, who has himself experienced in gender bending earlier, as *Shaurindhri* in the palace of Virat Raja, is socially beyond any inhibition and can freely choose to fall in love with someone, apparently unknown, who might be a transgendered female? He wonders how fascinating must the warrior princess be, who is a woman in her affection and a man in her valour, which somewhere strikes the gender discriminatory chord once more. Ironically, little does he know that princess Chitrangada is long lost under the reinstating of her sexual self. She has already disintegrated her true self that is considered 'the ugly' and has transformed into 'the beautiful one' and has consequently shed her glorious capabilities and orientation just because she is equally inclined to lead a romantic conjugal life with Arjun, who is ignorant of Chitrangada's true identity. Chitrangada here, takes the advantage of that ignorance and distracts Arjun's fancy by dissolving the imaginary Chitrangada's beautiful image by saying that she is ugly and unimpressive physically, not as beautiful as the one who is standing in front of Arjun right at that moment. It heightens the ironic quality of Tagore's representation of his gender-bending ideals. As he makes Chitrangada speak of herself, the words become an oblique jibe at gender typification, when Chitrangada describes her natural self as the brazen, shameless, lacking the seductive charm.

When Arjun is still thinking about warrior Chitrangada and fancies her, Chitrangada's female companions throw a satirical blow at Arjun. But his attraction is insurmountable, precisely because he is drawn to *that* Chitrangada whom he has heard to be "*ekadhare milito purush nari*" [That is, both a man and a woman in one body.] (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 161)

In the mean time, we also see Chitrangada being tired of her projected femininity and wants to return to her *Kurupa self*. She welcomes Arjun's desire and the language that Tagore uses here becomes a celebration of the woman, beyond her sexualized 'individuation'. Chitrangada is happy that finally woman is recognized as the warrior and the strong by man and this should be the opportuned moment for her to shed the false garb that she has so long assumed and now she can come out as her true self. This is a fascinating tryst of true and false identity. Chitrangada finds her masculine self to be true and her assumed femininity to be a falsified projection, which has tired her easily and thus she bids Madan again, to take his blessing back.

Chitrangada's companions here uphold Tagore's ideal and objective finally, when they utter out the maxim: "*Romonir mon-bholabar chholakola/dur kore diyethiya d(n)arak nari,/sorol unnoto beerjobonto ontorer bole/porboter tejoshwi toruntoru-somo—/jeno se shomman paye purusher/ rojonirnarmo shohochori,/ jeno bamhostoshomo/ dokshin hoster thake shohokari/ tahe jeno purushero tripti hoy, beerottomo*" (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 162)

[Woman must stand up, rejecting all the magical ways of conquering the heart. Her pure and high values of the powerful and glorious, like the evergreen sturdy trees of the mountains, stand by the man, with equal honour. The soft companion of the night, she must become man's equal company, like the left hand is the complement to the right hand. That must bring satisfaction to man.]

Chitrangada foretells what Butler sees as the inalienable force of the self that is unified with one's performance of sexuality. We would read this directly as Tagore's major objective to establish the model of identity that is bisexual or beyond gender stereotype and that makes *Chitrangada* a play much ahead of its time. The androgynous identity of Chitrangada becomes a classic example of what Judith Butler speaks of when she rejects coherent and structured identity and posits that gender is performative. One becomes what s/he lives. From that point of view, Chitrangada is more a man than a woman, but then again, she feels a sexual urge towards a man, which is natural and this pushes her to the cusp of an interesting admixture: of being (bodily) a woman yet (emotionally) a man yet again, (romantically) a woman and wanting to go back to the parallel masculine choices too. And we see, Chitrangada finally accommodates both in her body. She is the warrior princess, yet the loving wife of Arjun, and accepts his love only with the final precondition and reinstating of her resolve: "*Aami Chitrangada, aami rajendra nandini/nohi debi, nohi shamanya nari/puja kori more rakhibe urdhe/se nohi nohi/hela kori more rakhibe pichhe/ se nohi nohi/ jodi parshe rakho more,/sankate sampade,/sommoti dao jodi kothin brote/sohaye hote,/pabe tobe tumi chinite more*" (Tagore, *Rachanabali*, 164)

[I am Chitrangada, the princess, I am not the goddess, nor am I a simple girl. You would worship me and keep me away, or would you keep me carelessly behind – neither would it be. If you let me be by you, in times of trouble and moments treasurable, if you allow me to accompany you in keeping your vow, then only you would recognize my true worth.]

With this, Arjun and Chitrangada are united in a relationship of conjugality and Tagore reaches his goal – establishing the feminist ideal of living with gender fluidity that comes with performance and can be bent however required. From being a minor character in the Mahabharata, Tagore's Chitrangada becomes a futuristic take on woman's sexuality and living it as a choice which becomes a rather inclusive response

to what Tagore has always aimed to launch with various feminist voice he has created in his oeuvre: that is, the will and agency to recast one's own identity, be it social, emotional, encased or free of sexuality of any kind.

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Indeterminate Bodies: The Politics of Exclusion in Anosh Irani's *The Parcel*

Koyel Chanda

The gender binaries that structure the societal set up of numerous cultures have led to the exclusion, oppression and exploitation of those who do not fit into those binaries. Transgenders being one of those anomalies were not only marginalized but also suffered ridicule, violence and exploitation. The binaries that characterize our familial and social situations do not open up spaces for transgenders to express their unique experience.

Feminist scholarship has tried to change the lived realities of women by debunking the myth that gender is natural and is based on the sex that we are born with. A variety of factors are at play that produces masculine and feminine bodies. While feminists like Carol Gilligan have asserted that it is the child rearing practice that produces the different ways men and women behave, interact and think, feminists like Judith Butler have revolutionized the way we think about gender by challenging the idea that gender is dependent on sex. She argues that gender pre-exists the body and is not merely a cultural imposition on biological sex. In fact gender plays a deciding role in defining male and female bodies. Butler's arguments become particularly relevant in the case of intersexed bodies. Indeterminate physical characteristics are surgically modified to fit into the male/female categories. The multiplicity and fluidity of bodies and their experiences get lost and every individual has to follow the manual of gender appropriate behaviours.

What is gender appropriate is conveyed and normalized through a wide network of controls. Every individual in the society is entrusted with the task of keeping gender identities intact and all of us to some extent, participate in this task knowingly or unknowingly. From the rigidly gendered dress code to childrearing, everything eventually maintains the culturally sanctioned and approved gender behaviours. To quote Nivedita Menon from *Seeing Like a Feminist*:

[S]ocial order displays not the absolute presence or absence of intolerance to difference but a spectrum of intolerance. Each of us bears responsibility to some degree for maintaining these protocols of intolerance, which could not be kept in place if every single one of us did not play our part. From bringing up children 'appropriately', to lovingly

correcting or punishing their inappropriate behaviour, to making sure we never breach the protocols ourselves, to staring or sniggering at people who look different, to coercive psychiatric and medical intervention, to emotional blackmail, to physical violence - it's a range of slippages all the way that we seldom recognize.(3)

The disciplining and monitoring are carried out by family, the media, the religion and even education through subtle as well as coercive methods to preserve heteronormativity - the ideology that heterosexuality is the only normal form of human interaction. India had a history of same sex activity but the advent of British colonialism criminalized it in the 19th century. Menon elaborates on this phenomenon:

There is abundant scholarship which establishes that the delegitimation of homosexual desire and the production of the naturally heterosexual, properly bi-gendered (unambiguously male or female) population of citizens, with the women respectably desexualized, is a process that is central to nation formation all over the globe. (96)

The multiplicity of gender identities and sexual desires in India suffered a blow after the 19th century when various legal and cultural interventions legitimized heterosexuality and implemented an exclusionary policy of any non-conforming gender identities and sexual desires. This invariably led to the criminalization of homosexuality and the denigration of transgenders, intersex bodies.

For the sake of this paper I have attempted to clear up the terms 'transgenders' and 'intersex'. Transgenders are people who undergo surgical and hormonal procedures to become a person of the opposite sex. Hijras are men who have undergone castration to live like women or else they follow the feminine practices without castration. Intersex refers to people with ambiguous sexual organs. Anosh Irani's *The Parcel* deals with the deplorable living conditions of transgender, intersexed and sex workers in India.

Anosh Irani is an Indian born novelist who is now settled in Canada. He has produced highly acclaimed fictions and plays. His first novel *The Cripple and His Talismans* won him accolades for the depiction of the beggars' underworld. His other novels which also received critical praise and attention are *The Song of Kahunsa*, *Dahanu Road*, and his latest novel *The Parcel*, published in 2016, was shortlisted for Roger's Writers Trust Fiction and Governor General's Award for English-language fiction. In addition to his novels, his plays *The Matka King*, *My Granny the Goldfish*, *Bombay Black* have also garnered the attention of critics and readers.

The Parcel is set in Mumbai, and gives a realistic depiction of a red light area

named Kamathipura. At the heart of the novel is Madhu, a transgender whose journey from a traditional household to Hijra house forms the core of the novel. Madhu goes from being an ordinary school student to a prostitute and eventually resorts to begging. Madhu, however has another job that she occasionally performs. She acts as an agent who trains abducted and sold young girls for sex work at the red-light area. The title of the novel refers to these young girls who are forced into sex work. In training these girls Madhu's past comes back to haunt her and we get a glimpse of the exclusionary politics that pushes indeterminate bodies to the margins.

In addition to giving an unflinching portrait of the lives of sex workers and the Hijra community, the novel shows how mandatory it is for individuals to conform to gender appropriate behaviour in order to survive with minimum human dignity. Gender appropriate behaviour is required to maintain and protect the institution of marriage and also to continue procreative sexuality. Procreative sexuality is necessary to maintain crucial identities like race, caste and religion. So sexualities like that of Madhu's that do not contribute to procreation is censored and disciplined. Nivedita Menon in *Seeing Like a Feminist* states that, "The institution that manages this policing of sexuality is the patriarchal heterosexual family. The family as it exists is the core that sustains the social order." (4) Madhu's flashbacks throughout the novel illustrate the trauma that followed the sexual disciplining carried out by his overbearing father and timid mother.

Madhu's childhood was characterized by an uneasy relationship that he had with his family and his own body. Born to a History professor and a housewife, Madhu realized very early on that he was a disappointment to his parents. Madhu sought his father's validation but his father could not find in himself to give Madhu the acceptance he needed. "Each time he smelled the girl trapped inside Madhu, it would have rattled him, but his own worst fear, of public gossip, had already come true". (178) Madhu's mother also failed to give him acceptance and understanding. The birth of a second child made acceptance more difficult for Madhu as his parents now had a son who fulfilled their expectation. At one point in the novel, Madhu's mother puts down her second son Vijju and holds Madhu close but all she says is that the existence of Madhu is causing great harm to his father's reputation: "you behave like a girl. We may be poor, but as a teacher he commands respect...and you are taking away the one thing he has". (153) The role of the family in policing sexuality and maintaining gender appropriate behaviors becomes apparent here. Madhu never suffered explicit disciplining at his home, but the air of disappointment was enough to make him feel that he was abnormal.

If femininity is a social construct that imprisons women in restrictive roles, masculinity also comes with its own sets of limitations. Menon elaborates on this concept.

Deviant male bodies too, face disciplining procedures and marginalization – the gay male body, the effeminate male body, the aged male body. Visibly ‘effeminate’ men often face ridicule and even physical violence on the streets, while aged male bodies (that are not powerful through wealth and social status) are marginalized often humiliated by younger men and even women. (89)

Madhu had a double cross to bear, as he was a female trapped in a male body. In India the gender binaries are so rigid that any transgression leads to exclusion, violence or ridicule. Madhu’s condition is worsened by the fact that he was growing up in a culture that had fixed gender identities. A particular incident from the novel illustrates this. Madhu’s class teacher had asked him to spell a word on the blackboard. As Madhu got up and walked towards the class, he heard one of his classmates say that Madhu walked like a girl. The comment made Madhu to change the way he walked which elicited more laughter and ridicule from his classmates:

The minute Madhu resumed walking, the laughter became even louder because now he was trying not to walk like a girl. What resulted was a new kind of human being who tried not to sway, who became stiff and professorial. Madhu made it to the board, spelled the word, and fled to his seat. It was only when he sat down and read what he had written that he realized how scared he was. Instead of the word *canal* he had written three other.

I am sorry. (56)

Madhu’s unbearable living situation finds temporary respite after he befriends his classmate Taher. The association with Taher gives Madhu a sense of belonging but it is a short lived one as Madhu makes the mistake of holding Taher’s hand a little too long. Taher confronts him and beats him up and Madhu finally understands that he has no place in his world. Madhu’s brief relationship with Taher and its consequences reveals the homophobic mindset of Indian society. Heteronormativity being the norm in Indian society, same-sex desires are ignored, treated with violence or considered illegal. Same-sex desires do not contribute to procreative sexuality and hence they are stigmatized. Being born in the wrong body, Madhu had become drawn to Taher who exuded the masculinity that he lacked. However, Taher was a part of the homophobic culture and could not accept the fact that Madhu was attracted towards him. Thus, after his family, Madhu faced another rejection – this time from his peers. The various encounters that Madhu has throughout the novel all attest to the fact that the Indian societal system has no place for people who do not conform to the requirements of its

gender arrangements.

A chance encounter with the Hijra community becomes the beginning of a new life for Madhu. Enthralled by the sight of Hijras, Madhu for the first time experiences a sense of affinity but understands that they cannot become a part of his world. The marginalized position that Hijras occupy in the society offered Madhu the space to accept his unique identity. One of the Hijras had put her bangles around Madhu's wrists and he did not shy away from it or reject it.

Nine bangles on Madhu's wrist had made him feel more loved than nine months in his mother's womb....He had walked straight into his future. Hijra Gulli became his haunt. He tried on makeup, learned how to shuffle cards like a shark, chewed pan, smoked beedis until his tongue burned...understood the differences between a hermaphrodite, a transvestite, and a transgender, and heard gurumai's famous line, "The Third World is not a place, it is a gender."(99)

Madhu eventually runs away, undergoes castration and becomes a member of the Hijra community. But the societal set up of India does not open up spaces for transgenders that will allow them a decent livelihood. Madhu becomes a prostitute, servicing truck drivers for making a living. The toll of the sex work is somehow lessened by the fact that Madhu becomes a coveted sex worker in her area, famous for her beauty. The description of living reality of sex work shows that this profession has not only been stigmatized but also is a space where decency and legal repercussions come to die. With time Madhu becomes tired with her life choices and resorts to begging. The three livelihood options open to transgenders are sex work, begging or singing and dancing at weddings. Madhu eventually realizes that she is still on the margins of the society and that running away from home has not improved her situation one bit. Though she is among people of her own kind, she did not find the acceptance and validation that she had craved for. At one point of the novel, she faces the ugly reality of her existence:

Now she realized that she had left home only to fall into the illusion of freedom. The veil had lifted. She saw that she had chosen to live with a group of people who were as unwelcome in society as lice in hair. Her father's scorn has been replaced by society's.(171)

The *Parcel* abounds in stories of Hijras and sex workers and all the stories have one thing in common- marginalization and rejection by the heteronormative society. After running away from house Madhu became a Hijra and a disciple of gurumai who

ran the Hijra House. Anosh Irani gives an in-depth study of the Hijra community in Mumbai. Every Hijra needs to belong to a clan and has to serve under a Hijra leader. Half of the money that Hijras earn through begging, sex work or entertaining at social functions goes to this leader who has the final say in everything that matters to the Hijras. Any disobedience or rebellion is treated with punishment and excommunication. The world of Hijras has its own power games and positions but in the mainstream society they are treated with contempt and rejection. The story of how she emerged as the leader of the Hijra House reveals the lived realities of the intersexed people of the Indian society.

The assumption that bodies are strictly male or female is a relatively modern one. The male/female binaries that seem natural to us were not present as a major or concrete idea in Europe until the late sixteenth century and in South Asia and Africa until the early nineteenth century. Anne Fausto-Sterling in *Sexing the Body Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000) examines the way male and female bodies are created:

One of the major claims I make in this book is that labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender - not science - can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place (3).

Anne Fausto-Sterling's study also shows how in Europe intersexuals lost their unique identity in early twentieth century when they had to choose one sex to identify with. Modern medicine and surgical practices then proceeded to modify intersex bodies into male/female bodies.

The Age of Gonads gave way to the even less flexible Age of Conversion, in which medical practitioners found it imperative to catch mixed-sex people at birth and convert them, by any means necessary, to either male or female.(40)

European colonization brought these stock ideas to India and changed the way we look at hermaphrodites or intersexed bodies. Madhu's gurumai was born as Lalu, with ambiguous sex organs and his parents chose to raise him as a boy. But in the close knit Indian society, a secret like this could not be kept for long and he was sent away to Delhi to work as a domestic servant at the house of a poet and his sick wife. Lalu experiences happiness and acceptance in that house for three years until the demise of the poet and his wife. With the money left to him by the poet, he runs away to Bombay and begins the life of a Hijra. Gurumai's story exposes the harsh realities

of the poor. His lower income family did not have the resources to modify him surgically and he had to leave his family behind to survive. The other Hijras mentioned in the novel have similar stories and it is always the family with its heterosexual ideologies that first carries out the act of marginalization.

The heterosexual matrix of Madhu's society has no use of her as she does not have any role to play in procreative sexuality. However, Madhu desires to be a part of the same system that had excluded her. Her desire to reunite with her family, her craving for a family of her own all illustrate that the rigidity of gender identities does not allow her to create an alternate life for herself. Madhu eventually sacrifices herself to save the 10 year old girl she was training for sex work. What becomes evident from her situation is that as long as gender dualities are believed to be normative, the marginalization of transgenders will continue. The legal recognition will not alone help unless we confront the fluidity of gender identities and sexual desires. Once we accept that heterosexuality is just one form of sexual orientation and that bodies are not merely male or female, the politics of exclusion will end and different types of bodies will become visible. It is imperative for individuals to realize that the body has multiple ranges of possibilities and can embody different identities during a lifetime.

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**Being Transgender within Heteronormative Society:
A Study of the Autobiographies of A. Revathi and
Laxmi Narayan Tripathi**

Chanchal De Boxi

Heteronormativity is the belief that people fall into two distinct and complementary genders with natural roles in life. It describes how social institutions and policies reinforce the presumption that people are heterosexual and there is a natural binary in sex, that is, the male and the female. Heteronormative culture fosters the climate where LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) individuals suffer discrimination almost in every sphere of life such as in education, employment in government as well as private sector, marriage and tax codes. Michael Warner popularised the term, 'heteronormativity' in 1991, though the concept had its root in Gayle Rubin's notion of "Sex/gender system"¹ and Andrenne Rich's notion of "compulsory heterosexuality".² In a heteronormative patriarchal social set up, the geometry of gender always resembles a circular figure where the central coordinates are skewed towards the 'male' gender, thereby placing 'female' gender at the periphery. Feminists opposed this 'central-periphery' binary and demanded relocation of the coordinates. But, with the emergence of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) studies, this entire geometric orientation of heteronormativity was critically questioned so as to reconfigure the entire geometric edifice of gender as there is no such space assigned to the LGBT persons in the gender geometry. This paper, therefore, purports to show how the transgender people as a distinct category suffer marginalization, oppression as well as colonization in every sphere of their lives at the hand of heteronormative society. With a view to exploring further on this point, I have selected the autobiographies of two such transgender persons who once lived in the fringes of society and suffered much oppression, abject humiliation as well as severe physical torture but now managed to bag great social acclamation albeit after a great deal of struggle against the coercive as well as hegemonic forces of the heteronormative society. They are A. Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. They belong to the states of Tamilnadu and Maharastra respectively. In the light of their autobiographical narratives, this paper studies how the transgender people of India are deprived of their rights to live as an independent gendered category as well as how they are enmeshed in the mire of varied types of colonization such as linguistic, sartorial and economic.³ Moreover, they often become subject to various kinds of oppression, physical abuse and violence. Since 'gender' is a social construct and operates within a language system based on binary oppositions,

one normally moves within the socially approved axis of either male or female gender. Thus, the existence of the legally approved 'third gender' or the 'transgender' is ignored very often. The rudimentary struggle of the transgender community is the struggle for a dignified social recognition of the community as an independent existing gender category and that dignified social recognition can only be achieved if language is newly constructed. Stephen Whittle in the Foreword to *The Transgender Reader* points out:

[...] trans as a stand-alone term did not come into formal usage until it was coined by a parliamentary discussion group in London in 1998, with the deliberate intention of being as inclusive as possible when negotiating equality legislation. Cultural spaces and historiographies are constantly reframing the community, the identities, the cultures and the language. We see new languages being developed constantly; for example 'per' as a pronoun was developed by UK community members with non-existent gender identities and similarly the US term 'hir' for those who have both. (Stryker and Whittle xi-xii)

Naturally, the question arises regarding the recognition as well as the validity of such neologisms. How many of us are familiar with such pronouns like 'per' and 'hir'? It was Jacques Lacan who for the first time analysed the cause of language as highly gendered. Lacan being a poststructuralist psychoanalyst is of the opinion that the unconscious of an individual comes into being only in language. In his own words, this idea is expressed thus, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan 20). As language is a system of signs in relation and no sign has its meaning in isolation, a signifier acquires meaning only through a system of differences. All this system of differences is governed by the law of presence, where phallus is symbolic of presence. That is what is known as the 'law-of-the Father' which governs this 'phallogocentric' world. When a child is exposed to language during his 'symbolic phase', he just takes a 'subject position' in this greater realm of language. He cannot alter the gendered nature of language because it is already there. This notion of Lacan influenced the French feminists and they talked of creating 'écriture feminine' (women's writing) which would be markedly different from the canonical writing in the male ordained language. Helen Cixous first coined the term 'écriture feminine' in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" where she asserted "woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven as violently as from their bodies."⁴ Similarly, the transgender or the third gender needs to create 'a language of their own' to specifically address their desires and problems so that they could make themselves scot free from this lingual colonization.

Born as the youngest male sibling in the family of three brothers and a sister, A. Revathi was initially baptized as Doraisamy. On the other hand, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, alias Raju, took his birth as the eldest male sibling in a Brahmin family of Maharashtra. While referring to the childhood phase of both Laxmi and Revathi one gets perplexed when it comes to the choice of pronouns—whether to use ‘he’/‘she’, ‘his’/‘her’ because in the binary system of language there is no as such pronouns to serve the need of the so called third gender or the transgender person. The absence of such pronouns pinpoints the fact that the transgender have only an epistemological existence without any ontological existence. Born with the body of a male, A. Revathi (Doraisamy) was expected to behave like a male by the heteronormative society. But, Doraisamy’s ‘male body’ nurtured the desires and passions of a ‘female’. He/she always felt that a woman is trapped within a man’s body. A. Revathi, thus, expresses the anomaly of his/her character in the autobiography, *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*:

A woman trapped in a man’s body was how I thought of myself [...] I wondered why God had chose to inflict this peculiar torture on me, and why He could not created me wholly male or wholly female. Why am I a flawed being, I wondered often.....and all the time I obsessed, confused and anxious. (Revathi 15)

Very similar kind of feeling is expressed by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi in his/her autobiography, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*:

A hijra is neither a man nor a woman. She is feminine, but not a woman. He is masculine, a male by birth, but not that a man either. A hijra’s male body is a trap — not just to the hijra itself who suffocates within it, but to the world in general that wrongly assumes a hijra to be a man. (Tripathi 40)

Laxmi in the autobiography narrates incidents to show how passionately he/she wanted to dress like a woman and how he/she enjoyed playing the role of female characters:

I liked being a drag queen. But then drag queens cross-dressed only sporadically, for show, where as I wanted to drape myself in a sari and wear skirts every single day. (Tripathi 29)

Revathi also enjoyed putting on female disguise during the celebration of the Mariamman festival in their village:

I played Chandramathi in Harishchandra[...] I think I did this exceptionally well, because everyone praised me saying

that I looked and acted like real woman. (Revathi 9)

Thus, 'dress' being one of the major and perhaps the most important marker of heteronormative gender code, 'cross-dressing' or transvestism is regarded as the primary source of desire fulfilment by the transgender community. Through the binary sense of dressing pattern, the heteronormative society actually creates a hegemonic discourse to strengthen its colonizing process over the marginalised third gender community. As the third gender does not have any such specific set of dressing pattern, the transgender cannot but oscillate between the male and female dressing pattern, thereby conforming themselves within either of the two socially approved gender categories. There is no denying the fact that this forceful submission of the third gender to the 'grand narrative' of heteronormative dress code speaks volumes for their colonized state. Even within the hijra community itself, dress code is not just so innocent. It is highly emblazoned with motifs of hierarchy and power game. When the elders of the hijra community when accept a newcomer like Revathi or Laxmi Narayan for the first time as a chela, it is a compulsion that a feminine man offers respect to the sari-clad and earns their good will. So, the sari-clad within the hijra community enjoy a special status and respect. While narrating in detail the customs and rules of the hijra community, Revathi also refers to the importance of dress to earn respect:

If born a pottai, and when living amongst pottais, it is important that a person pierces her ears and nose, grows her hair. If you merely wear press-button earrings and a wig, no one really respect you. Likewise, if you happen to see a man crossing your path, you are expected to make way for him, bend your head bashfully and make sure that your chest is covered. (Revathi 47)

Revathi narrates one of the painstaking as well as humiliating incidents when she went to have a driving licence. After standing in a long queue for two hours, when it was Revathi's turn, the inspector threw the papers of Revathi for not belonging to either of the socially approved categories. Revathi vociferates against the system which grants licence only to men or women:

Well I was born a man and become a woman. I have taken an insurance policy in my name, that is, Revathi. My name has been changed in ration card. What more do you need to issue a licence? I have come here to get one, because like every-one else I want to live by the law. If you don't give a licence, I'll drive without one. And if someone stops me and asks for my licence, I'll say that you refused to give me one. I'll even go to the papers and appear on television, I'll

tell people that government only issues licences to men or women, not to people like me. (Revathi 226)

Finally, the driving licence was issued under Revathi's name though the licence did not specify Revathi's gender. Revathi's brothers did not like her staying with her parents and wanted her out of the house. Her parents too felt that Revathi's presence could cause trouble. Even her father prompted to disinherit Revathi. The strange logic behind this disinheritance is that Revathi would never marry and she could never bear children, so she would not ever need any inheritance. But, Revathi always sent her hard-earned money to her parents. After being ostracized from her own family, Revathi reached the nadir of despondency and lamented over her in-between state as if she belonged neither to family nor to the society. Such is the condition of the millions of transgenders in our country. Revathi, therefore, raves on in anger and humiliation:

If society scorns us, then we turn to our families, if we have a family. But if family scorns us, who do we then to? Is this why people like me do not stay in touch with their families? Could not God created me as a man or woman? Why did He make me this way? Why is He savouring this spectacle He created? In a rage, hitting my head against the wall, I began to cry. (Revathi 186)

Unlike Revathi who constantly portrays herself as a victim, Laxmi's endeavour seems to be to show that she is not altogether so much victimized. Whereas Revathi had to endure the excruciating pain of castration, Laxmi adopted the hijra lifestyle without having castration. While most hijras like Revathi are shown the door by their families, Laxmi expresses inexplicable gratitude to her parents who accepted her with her anomalies:

I am a hijra and have been accepted by my family. This is a rare in a culture where deviant sexuality is enough for parents to disown their offspring. Some hijras are initially kicked out by their families, and later welcomed when they start earning and sending them money. The money is often earned through sex work, but the parents have no qualms in accepting it. Doesn't this amount to pimping one's daughters? (Tripathi 168)

Laxmi, thus, is much escorted by her education and her parents. After becoming a hijra by choice, Laxmi becomes an activist, works for the eradication of AIDS among her people, steers an organisation, Astitva and attends TV shows like DushKa Dum, SaachKaSaamna and Big Brother. However, these activities of Laxmi do not mean that life becomes smooth and easy going for her after becoming a hijra. Actually

she had to swim, at the same time, against two currents—the mainstream society and the ghettoized life of hijra community. The community fined her for the transgression of the ghettoized life. She paid the fine and committed the ‘offences’ of transgression again only to be escorted by her education and popularity as an activist. It was dancing that ensured her place in the main stream society. So, she got the privilege to live both the lives of a hijra and a denizen of mainstream society:

There is the ghetto and there’s the mainstream. My dominant identity was that of a hijra. I wanted to live with the hijras but I also wanted to live in society. Luckily, for me, I was both the dancer and an activist. So, while activism enabled me to live in the ghetto, my dancing ensured that i was also a part of mainstream society. (Tripathi 118)

Unlike Laxmi’s, the panoramic picture of the hijra community in India, She shows in her narrative is that of one characterized by ostracism, poverty, abject humiliation, brutality and violence. Alongside lingual and sartorial colonization, the transgender community of India stifles under economic colonization. In India, the most common sight of a hijra is to see them either begging in market place or in railway station or to see them in groups going for “doli-badhahi”. Laxmi Narayan expresses her disgust against the custom of “doli-badhahi” and thereby claiming reform and empowerment for the hijra community:

Our main occupation is to perform badhai or wedding or when child is born. But can badhai alone fill our stomachs? Obviously not, and so we supplement our earnings by begging on city streets and going to the shops. We also do sex work and dance in bars and night clubs. Dancing comes naturally to us hijras. (Tripathi 156)

Similarly A. Revathi also vociferates against this age old custom and bewails for their degraded state:

Hijras play dholak and sing and dance, and this is called doli-badhahi. They do this at weddings and during child birth. People give them what they can afford- rice, wheat, a sari. Hijras find out where there’s been a birth and send word to the family, saying that they would arrive on such and such day to bless the new born and they must be given badhai [...] Similarly, Hijras go to marriage halls and sing and dance, teasing the groom and bride, which pleases them and they too give money. (Revathi 47)

Now, one would very easily get tempted to accuse the hijra community for choosing the life of a beggar but does one ever acknowledge the truth that a hijra is never allowed to enter the mainstream economy in whatever form it may be? It is not that they are inefficient to carry out jobs other than begging and sex work but the discrimination is due to the fact that heteronormative society is tactful enough in perpetuating its hegemonic gender discourse. Why is it that we don't find any shop where a hijra is its owner or if not owner at least an attendant? Have we ever met any hijra taxi or auto driver? Sadly enough the answer is big no! If this is the scenario of private entrepreneurship, can one expect a different scenario in government sector or in academic domain? In India the application form for any government job necessarily maintains a column specifying the gender of the applicant but that specification is clearly stated to be either a 'male' or 'female'. So at the very beginning it is assumed that there cannot be any eligible candidate seeking job whose gender preference is different from that of a male or female. So Laxmi vociferates:

One of the issues we raised was that in all government application forms, one had to state one's gender as either male or female. But hijras are neither male nor female. That means we couldn't fill out application forms! Which in turn, implied that a hijra couldn't get a passport or a ration card as a hijra... we suggested that we were), or other, and that, henceforth, all application forms should have an option for 'O'. (Tripathi 131)

This very negation of allowing the hijra community to take part in productive economic output makes them all the more an object of rejection and derision. The irony lies in the fact that it is the mainstream society that denies their entry into the mainstream productive economy, and it is the mainstream society itself that curses them for living a parasitic life.

Revathi in her autobiography vividly depicts the abject humiliation and horrors related to sex work. At the initial stage of her life in the transgender community, Revathi did not indulge herself in sex work. She earned money only by begging in the market places. But once Revathi got 'nirvaanam' (castration), she felt an insatiable thirst for sexual pleasure. Partly this desire for sexual gratification and partly her hand to mouth condition made it imperative for her to indulge in sex work. While indulging in sex work Revathi, once, was visited by a 'rowdy' and severely tortured by him. Revathi vividly describes the horror of the situation:

I felt trapped and not knowing what to do, I had to accede to his demands. I held onto his legs and pleaded when he wanted me to do things and I did not like doing. (He wanted

me to have anal sex with him.) He spat abuse at me and forced me into the act. When I screamed in pain and yelled for my guru, he shut my mouth with one of his hands, whipped out a knife with the other and threatened to take it to my throat. I was hurting all over, and yet had to give in and do as he told me. The skin down there felt abraded, and I was bleeding. Unmindful, he left, but only after he had snatched my purse away from me. Man like him will understand the terror and pain they cause only if they become hijras and are hurt by rowdy men such as themselves. (Revathi 108)

From the perspective of a transgender person involved in sex work, there is no such basic difference between a policeman and a rowdy. Revathi shared one of such experiences of her with a policeman. The inhuman torture that Revathi had to suffer at the hand of the policeman is certainly a disgrace to the law as well as administrative system. Revathi narrates thus:

I screamed that I did not want to go into the cell. I fell at the policeman's feet. He kicked me with his boots. He then asked me to take my clothes off—right there, while the prisoner was watching. I pleaded with him and wept, but he forcibly stripped me. When I was standing naked, he stuck his lathi where I'd had my operation and demanded that I stand with my legs apart, like a woman would. He repeatedly struck at that part with his lathi and said, 'so, can it go in there? Or is it a field one can't enter? How do you have sex then?' (Revathi 206)

Since law and society in our country do not acknowledge their (transgenders) rights, they had to lead a life of oppression and ostracization. Circumstances, faulty laws and social hatred have left them with no course but to beg and do sex work. Every hijra is born with some possibility in life but the possibility requires right opportunity and context to find expression. In Revathi's case Sangama finally enabled her to find herself. Sangama is an organization fighting for the rights of the transgender persons. Revathi was given a job as an office assistant with a pay of two thousand and five hundred rupees. Though the salary was meagre, this organization made Revathi feel proud as a social worker and provided her with the feeling of working with dignity. Revathi at last vindicates the rights of transgenders in relentless words:

Are not we human too, born of mothers as others are? We have right, just like others, we are citizen of this nation. Don't we want all those rights, that are granted to other

citizens: the rights to have a ration card, to hold property, to have a passport, the right to work, to marry, adopt or raise a child? (Revathi 247)

We often boast of our cultured as well as civilized society but in reality we never hesitate to show off our bestial instinct to those marginalized sections of our society. Could we not expect a bit more human feeling and sensibility towards the transgender people? Why do we intend to deny them of their rights to live independently as common human beings?

The hijra community in India is, thus, enmeshed in the mire of multi-layered colonization such as linguistic, sartorial and economic colonization as well as varied types of oppressions at the hand of heteronormative society. There are too few transgender persons like Laxmi Narayan, the first transgender to represent Asia Pacific in UNO, Manobi Bandyopadhyay, the first transgender principal of our country, ShabnamMausi, once elected MLA in Madhya Pradesh and Kamal Jan, the elected mayor of Katni City, who enabled themselves to drag out of this mire and puddle to a certain extent after striving hard against the brutal force of the hegemonic as well as coercive power structure of heteronormative patriarchy. To the majority of the 'hijras' they have been certainly the light at the end of the dark tunnel. But most of them are not so strong as well as fortunate enough to ward off the blows of heteronormative patriarchy. A great number of them are thrown out of their homes and are forced to beg on the streets or to do sex work. Death only comes to deliver them from the wretched lives they are compelled to live. How long time will this so called progressive mainstream society take only to accept the Hijras (transgenders) as human beings like male and female ones? Hopefully, in the ensuing days the mainstream society will acknowledge the dignity of the hijra community and consider them as human beings like male and female ones.

Endnotes

1. Rubin, Gale. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" Of Sex." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. ed. R. Reiter, Monthly Review Press, 1975, pp. 157-210. Web. 8th February, 2018.
2. Rich, Andrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 631-60. Web. 12th January, 2018.
3. I am indebted to Mousim Mondal's article, "Gender Geometry: A Study of A. Revathi's Autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*" for primary exposure of different types of colonization suffered by the transgender community in India.
4. Cixous, Helen. "The Laugh of Medusa." *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875-93. Web. 23rd December, 2017.

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Representation of Female Sexuality in the Christian World of *Dracula*

Soumya Sundar Mukherjee

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has been regarded as one of the two greatest monster tales written in the Victorian era, the other being Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The impact of this evil vampire figure on the literary world is so enormous that in his 'Introduction' to *Dracula & Dracula's Guest* David Roger writes: "Stoker's neck-biting, blood-sucking, ubiquitous Count has probably been the most widely popularised anti-hero in the whole of Western culture. More than two hundred and fifty films and innumerable stories and comics owe their inspiration to his figure..." (Rogers 7) One of the principal reasons of the novel's long-lasting impact on the public mind is its striking portrayal of sexuality which is often thinly veiled under vampirism. *Dracula* is a fantasy that many of the readers can relate with the fears and desires of their unconscious. The vampire sisters of the novel and the transformed Lucy Westenra brought to mind the image of a woman who was sexually assertive and was not ashamed of flaunting her desire of the body although it was not considered 'normal' in Victorian England. As a monster tale, *Dracula* is representative of the fears of the society in which it is born. Cohen writes:

The monster is ... an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy, giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically "that which reveals", "that which warns," a glyph that seeks a hierophant. (Cohen, 4)

Stoker's masterpiece is quite a rich field for these "reveals", although in this paper the discussion will be narrowed to that of sexuality. *Dracula* deals with elements of male homoeroticism as well as sexually aggressive women, but in the limited scope of this paper, our main focus will be on the representation of female sexuality in an England that was overtly Christian. To understand Stoker's portrayal of female sexuality, we must turn to the socio-religious doctrine of what is considered good and what is evil, because it is Christianity that functions as the 'weapon' in the novel, protecting the people from the evils of vampirism.

The ever-alert voice of religion that associates female sexuality with evil is unmistakably there in Stoker's work. The Victorian society, which was extremely conservative, found the sexual urge in a woman embarrassing and made it a tabooed subject. The ideal Victorian woman was chaste and modest and the society they lived in expected them to be like that. Fiona Tolan writes:

Feminists... have pointed to the frequency with which novels punish women associated with sexuality and lust. Typical examples would include Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, both of which contain adulterous heroines who eventually commit suicide in misery and torment. Both texts were notorious for their frank depiction of female sexuality, but a feminist reading demonstrates that both authors apply a conservative resolution to their seemingly progressive novels. In both, the transgressive female is eventually penalized for her actions, and the patriarchal moral code is reasserted and actually strengthened. (Tolan, 327)

We find two different types of women in the novel. There are Mina and Lucy (before being bitten), the two embodiments of chastity and modesty; and, on the other hand, there are the "weird sisters" whose epithet is always 'voluptuous'. The very voluptuousness of the vampire women are suggestive of their evilness to the Victorian reader. Luce Irigaray's comment about the power of men over women in a patriarchy is significant: "Everywhere and in all things, they define women's function and social role, and the sexual identity they are, or are not, to have." (Irigaray, 433) When Lucy, after falling a prey to Dracula, turns into a vampire, she herself becomes a 'voluptuous' woman who is so greatly hated by society that there is no way but to destroy her and turn her back to the modest, chaste and acceptable woman who does not pose a threat to male sexuality or the religious status quo. This becomes clear when we discover Lucy in her vampire form:

"... [B]ut Lucy's eyes *unclean* and full of *hell-fire*, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew. ... As she looked, her eyes blazed with *unholy* light, and the face became wreathed with a *voluptuous* smile. Oh, God, how it made me shudder to see it! With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a *devil*, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone." (Stoker, 202) [My italics]

The passage describes Lucy Westenra in her un-dead form in horrifying details.

The description is full of antithetical wordplays: “unclean”, “hell-fire” and “unholy” against “pure” and “gentle”, “God” against “devil”. And words like “voluptuous”, “growl” and “dog” emphasize the villainous and beastly qualities of the creature. She flung a “child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast”, thus transforming her Madonna-like pose to demonic one, which is symbolic of her rejection of Christ, or the Christian faith, because Christ is often associated with a child. Her dog-like (or ‘bitch’-like?) growl symbolises the demonic qualities in her. This is further proven when she, in “diabolically sweet” tone, tempts Arthur to come to her arms and Van Helsing produces the golden crucifix, resulting in her recoiling from it. Thus it is shown that the female sexuality is an evil thing which is kept in check by the instruments of religion, i.e., the crucifix. Then we witness the deeply religious people to stake her heart, behead her and fill her mouth with garlic, thus keeping the ‘bad’ female in leash. Van Helsing justifies this murder of a sexually expressive woman as God’s wish, labelling her a ‘monster’: “Thus are we ministers of God’s own wish. That the world, and men for whom His Son die, will not be given over to monsters, whose very existence would defame Him.” (Stoker, 295) And it is quite interesting to note that Helsing refers to Lucy’s beheading as God’s permission “to redeem one soul already”. Phyllis A. Roth correctly points out the significance of Van Helsing’s motivational speech: “... the use of religion not only to exorcise the evil but to justify the murders is striking. In other words, Christianity is on our side, *we must* be right.” (Roth, 416) Sexuality of a woman is so frightening an idea to the male psyche that, in a patriarchal society, it always needs to be manacled. According to Simone de Beauvoir:

Patriarchal civilisation condemned woman to chastity; the right of man to relieve his sexual desires is more or less openly recognised, whereas woman is confined within marriage; for her the act of the flesh, if not sanctified by the code, by a sacrament, is a fault, a fall, a defeat, a weakness; she is obliged to defend her virtue, her honour; if she ‘gives in’ or if she ‘falls’, she arouses disdain, whereas even the blame inflicted on her vanquisher brings him admiration. (de Beauvoir, 397)

Christianity has always spoken against the sin of the body and women are assigned the role of good wives and good mothers. “Flee fornication,” says the Bible. “Every sin that a man doeth is without the body: but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” (Corinthians 6:18) Vampirism itself is erotic in nature, because the exchange of body-fluids is just another form of sexual activity; the scenes where Harker eagerly waits to get penetrated by the fangs of the vampire women or where Mina drinks blood at Count Dracula’s breast are unmistakably and disturbingly sexual. Significantly, only the relations with the vampires are eroticised in *Dracula*. Phyllis A.

Roth significantly points out:

All the close relationships, including those between Lucy and her three suitors and Mina and her husband, are spiritualized beyond credibility. Only when Lucy becomes a vampire is she allowed to be “voluptuous,” yet she must have been so long before, judging from her effect on men and from Mina’s description of her. ... Clearly, then, vampirism is associated not only with death, immortality and orality; it is equivalent to sexuality. (Roth, 414)

Sexuality, especially in women, are forbidden, and the women who are overtly sexual are demonized in the novel. The ‘weird sisters’ in Count Dracula’s castle are beings to be feared and hated. Jonathan Harker waits for getting ‘kissed’ by the vampire woman, although he knows in his heart that this is wrong. Stoker masterfully describes the scene:

All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one’s flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer - nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I close my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart. (Stoker, 56)

The fact that Harker is ready to taste the forbidden fruit in spite of its consequences does not glorify the woman. As she is the enemy, she is the ‘Other’ whose conduct is

typically the opposite of the norms of society. In spite of being a woman she is not reluctant to express her sexual desire, and thus she creates “some longing and at the same time some deadly fear” in the mind of Harker who is a representative of the ideal Victorian gentleman. The red lips of attractive women have a close association with sexuality. Desmond Morris observes: “What makes the lips visually so sexual? The answer is that in their shape, their texture and their colour, they are mimics of the female’s other lips, the ones so intensely sexual that, even today, they are spoken of in a classical language – *labia* being Latin for *lips*.” (Morris, 80) The thrill that Harker feels when the vampire woman is about to bite him is undeniably carnal in nature and he himself admits it when he labels his own desire as “wicked”; the desire is wicked because it is not sanctioned by Christianity which performs the role of the protector of the patriarchal society. In this connection we must recall what Lois Tyson said about the gender roles assigned to women. “...patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a “good girl”; if she doesn’t, she’s a “bad girl”. These two roles – also referred to as “Madonna” and “whore” or “angel” and “bitch” – view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order.” (Tyson, 89) Tyson’s words become relevant in the novel when, after the death of the Lucy the voluptuous, Lucy the chaste surfaces to her killers who feel a satisfaction for restoring the norms of society, turning her back to the chaste woman (at the cost of her life) that she should have been. Sexual awareness in woman is considered ‘foul’ by Dr Seward as he notes the post-death scene of Lucy: “There in the coffin lay no longer the foul Thing that we had so dreaded and grown to hate that the work of her destruction was yielded as a privilege to the one best entitled to it, but Lucy as we had seen her in her life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity.” (Stoker, 207)

This is what the male looks for in the woman he wants to marry: “sweetness and purity”. He cannot tolerate a woman who is not afraid to announce her sexual desires in open, and Christianity comes to his aid to label the woman as ‘foul’. It must not be forgotten that religion played an important part in shaping the minds of the Victorian people. Trevelyan observes: “The popular heroes of the period – and they were true heroes – were religious men first and foremost: Livingstone the African explorer and missionary; General Gordon the soldier-philanthropist; Lord Shaftesbury and Mr Gladstone; to these four, so different from one another and from everyone else, life was the service of God.” (Trevelyan, 576) In the minds guided by religion, women are expected to maintain their modesty. Christopher Craft sheds light upon the attitude of Van Helsing and his crew to women: “A woman is better still than mobile, better dead than sexual.” (Craft, 455) We must not forget that whenever a woman becomes sexually assertive, she is denied her own voice in the novel: Lucy’s narrative is silenced once she begins to manifest her erotically independent behaviour, and the three

‘voluptuous’ vampire women never get a single line of first-person narration in the whole novel.

Stoker’s text does not stop at the presentation of sexually aggressive women, but it rejects the Victorian gender codes and thus takes the ‘disturbing’ to the next level. In every sphere of life, man is supposed to be the active one, or the one doing all the adventure and the discoveries, whereas the society expects woman to be nurturing, passive and incorruptible. Helene Cixous points out: “Traditionally the question of sexual difference is coupled with the same opposition: activity/ passivity. ... In philosophy, woman is always on the side of passivity. ... There is an intrinsic bond between the philosophical and the literary (to the extent that it signifies, literature is commanded by the philosophical) and phallocentrism. The philosophical constructs itself starting with the abasement of woman. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order appears to be the condition for the functioning of the machine.” (Cixous, 283-4) We have seen Harker waiting to be bitten by the fair vampire woman at Dracula’s castle. Christopher Craft correctly points out: “Stoker, whose vampiric women exercise a far more dangerous “changefulness” ..., anxiously inverts this conventional pattern, as virile Jonathan Harker enjoys a “feminine” passivity and awaits a delicious penetration from a woman whose demonism is figured as the power to penetrate. ... Luring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, the vampire mouth fuses and confuses what Dracula’s civilized nemesis Van Helsing and his Crew of Light, works so hard to separate – the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive, or to use Van Helsing’s language, the complementary categories of “brave men” and “good women”. ... Dracula’s daughters offer Harker a feminine form but a masculine penetration.” (Craft, 445-6)

This same inversion is observed when Dracula makes Mina drink the blood from his breast. Stoker compares the event with that of a kitten being forcefully fed by pressing its nose in a saucer of milk. That vampirism is another form of sexuality as it is all about an exchange of body fluids is again made evident. But it seems to be a perverted form of sexual enjoyment and it is the male partner who is being sucked and the female is at the receiving end. But Mina survives the attack of Dracula, because she does not end up a ‘voluptuous’ woman like Lucy. Mina is the ‘mother’ figure in the novel; and it is the sons’ duty to protect the mother from the evil father-figure of Dracula. The men in the novel act like sons of Mina and she, too, is found doing her motherly duties; it is she who comforts Arthur after Lucy’s death. Mina, unlike Lucy, never gets a full-fledged description of her body in the novel, and this is significant, because, as a woman, she will, unlike Lucy, survive at the end of the novel, giving birth to a son, fulfilling her motherly duty to society. Mina obeys the rules of patriarchy unlike Lucy, who “succumbs to the thrall of the independent lifestyle offered her by

Dracula, a transgression for which she is severely punished. After being transformed into a vampire, she is hunted down, staked, and beheaded by *Dracula's* male heroes. This serves as a grave warning to all women who entertain thoughts of following Lucy's wayward example. Stoker has used Lucy as a cautionary tale, warning women of what will befall them should they chose to stray from the path." (Nystrom, 70) Mina never dares to follow the path of Lucy and performs her duty as 'mother' and she is rewarded with a happy conjugal life for accepting her gender-role, whereas the 'bitches' i.e. Lucy and the three 'voluptuous' vampire women get their due by getting slain at the hands of men, thus restoring the equilibrium most cherished by patriarchy.

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**Locating Gaps in Women Slave Narratives:
*Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear and Memoir of Old Elizabeth***

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Slave narratives constitute a foundational genre in African-American literary tradition. The advent of nineteenth century saw an increase in prominence of narratives by those who had been enslaved in chattel slavery. The personal stories recounted by slaves seek to attest their humanity against the crushing citadel of slavery. These narratives provide a subversive view of the pro-slavery aesthetics, an aesthetics which reigned in the continents involved in trans-Atlantic slavery since fifteenth century. These narratives testify that institutionalised slavery was much more than a complex matrix of trade, economy and unprecedented exploitation of slaves. Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *The Slave's Narrative* (1985) delineates that the autobiographical narratives by the erstwhile slaves of African origin caught in trans-Atlantic slavery “has a twofold purpose: to demonstrate the nature and function of the interpretation of this curious genre of literature and to explicate the structure of the world these narratives represent (6).” Prior to the rise in prominence of the genre of slave narratives, in the western grand narrative of history, the black subject ascribed with stereotypical negativities such as being savage/inferior/ignorant as opposed to the enlightened white man, had always been overlooked. But the slave narratives offering substantial “incredulity towards the metanarratives (Lyotard 25)” rendered a postmodern status to this genre; it sought to include the heterogeneity of slave voices as “the other” in the white master’s narrative.

A gendered intervention into this genre of slave narratives provides a deeper understanding of the complex world of slavery. Narratives by erstwhile female slaves become the source for claiming the voices of women which remained largely unheard during slavery. Narratives such as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) or *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) provide an insider’s view into the complex world of slavery where a female slave remained trapped in the double bind of a simultaneously racist and sexist social order. A black female slave was positioned at the bottommost rung in the hierarchy of slavery and thereby systematically oppressed by racist-patriarchal domination. Recounting the past of a phenomenon as complex and painful as slavery, the narratives by women slaves also seem attempts to reconstruct their broken selves. In the book, *Autobiographical Memory and Construction of a Narrative Self* (2003), Robyn Fivush says that “personal stories are not merely a way

of telling someone about one's life, they are the means by which identities may be fashioned (149)." Through these individual narratives, the collective psyche of black womanhood can be traced.

Also, the narratives by women slaves act as a kind of precursor to the literary tradition of African-American women writers. The multi-nuanced self of the black woman in African-American literature owes itself to the history of slavery. The black women writers of twentieth century associate the complex position occupied by the modern black African-American woman to the precincts of institutionalised slavery. The ascription that a black woman is devoid of any maternal feeling is traced back to such roots in certain texts by African-American woman writers. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), when Pecola's Mother is pregnant with Pecola, her second child, the doctors believe that a black woman is immune to the pain of childbirth: "The old man was learning the young ones about the babies. When he got to me, he said now these here woman you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away with no pain. Just like horses (Morrison 125)." Such ascriptions had been utilized to legitimize the severing of slave children from their mothers and families, as exemplified in the narratives of female slaves. In *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, Truth recalls "she wishes that all who would often believe that slave parents have no natural affection for their offspring could have listened as she did while Bomefree and Mau-mauBett [her parents] would sit for hours, recalling and recounting every endearing (15)."

Against this backdrop, the present paper aims to study two narratives by woman slaves who underwent the ordeal of slavery and who claimed their voices through their narration of the ordeal. It also seeks to explore the problematic gaps in these narratives. *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear, a Native of Africa, Who was Enslaved in Childhood and Died in Boston, January 3 1815, Aged 65 Years: A Lady of Boston* (1832) and *Memoir of Old Elizabeth: A Coloured Woman* (1863) are two narratives by women who looked back on their experiences through the lens of acquired maturity. In the first narrative, Mrs Chloe Spear was abducted from the African hinterland and transported in the "dismal slave ship" to America:

Notwithstanding the piteous cries and tears of these poor defenceless children, they were arrested by cruel hands, put in to a boat, and carried to the dismal Slave Ship which lay off a few miles in the river, the horrid receptacle of a living cargo, stolen from its rightful soil, by barbarous hunters of human prey for the purposes of traffic. Terror and amazement, as may be supposed, took full possession of their minds (Spear 10-11).

For Chloe and several others like her, the novelty of such an experience soon

translated into dreadfulness. As Chloe recollects, they were disposed off like cattle taken to a fair, to the highest bidder. These dehumanizing acts scarred the innocent minds of the enslaved children who still cherished “full expectations of returning to their several homes (Spear 13).” Chloe categorically states that the supposedly enlightened people did not seem to realize that it was an inhuman act to uproot fellow beings from their native land. The onus of such wickedness was systematically evaded by the white masters.

For slaves, “the master’s family” was all pervasive. The absolute internalization of this hierarchy prevailed in the psyche long after slaves were granted freedom. Mrs. Chloe Spear remained at her master’s services “by choice”: “For the grand children it was a peculiar gratification to have a visit from ‘good old Chloe (49)’”. As evident, for the next generation of slaveholders also, the status of Chloe remained not much different from her life in bondage.

Religion plays a problematic role in the recounted experiences of the slaves. The same religion which upheld the tenets of love, forgiveness, and equality was turned upside down for the slaves to save the citadel of slavery. Atrocities in stark contrast to Christian values were inflicted upon the slaves to keep them docile and subjugated. For a woman slave, the issue became more complicated due to her sexual vulnerability. bell hooks, in her book *Ain’t I A Woman?* (1982) says that “the nakedness of African female[slave] served as a constant reminder of her sexual vulnerability. Rape was a common method to subdue a black female (18).” Thus, the supposed morality of the white “Christian” masters took a backseat as the black female slave became an ideal subject for subjugation. In her memoir, Chloe recollects “how far the passages of scriptures were applicable to the conducts of Mr. B [her master], it is not our providence to determine (Spear 29).” Within the precincts of the master’s household, a black woman slave was vulnerable to sexual exploitation. But the immaculate white master neatly shifted the onus of “violation of sacred commandment of nature (hooks, 25)” onto the black slave woman’s court. Hence the slave woman was labeled with the ascription of being sexually excessive and her position was equaled to that of a prostitute. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Ann Jacobs (Linda Brent) recollects her harrowing experience of sexual exploitation by her master: “He peopled my young mind with unclean images such as only a vile master could think of...I was compelled to live under the same roof with him, where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature. He told me I was his property and that I must be subject to his will in all things (Brent 44).” Here her knowledge of her master’s religion helps her critique the duality of her master. In *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1857) Martha Griffith Browne recollects her past when “every moment seemed to me an age, for I dreaded the awakening of my cruel master. Little did I dream that the horrid day’s experience was but a brief foretaste

of what I had yet to suffer (Browne 19)?”

These narratives reveal the hypocrisy of Janus-faced Christianity. Christianity seems to thrive only by crushing all other existing spiritual beliefs; otherwise its supremacy seems threatened. On one hand, it systematically glorifies the grandeur of the Lord. On the other, it categorically seeks to negate the presence of any other “heathen” belief by according it the status of “superstition”. In Chloe’s narrative, when at twelve years of age, in her absolute loneliness she wished to die and thereby go back home to her friends and country, this is accorded the status of a superstition by the narrator of her narrative:

Thus divided from all she held dear in this life, and knowing nothing of a better, she sighed, and wished for death, supposing that when she dies, she should return to her country and friends. This imagination she derived from a *superstitious* tradition of her ancestors, who, she said, supposed that the first infant born in a family after the decease of a member, was the same individual come back again, just as they saw a young moon appear after the old one was gone away. (Spear 17)

Interestingly, Mrs. Spear’s narrative has a preface from the editor/narrator who is “a member of the Second Baptist Church in Boston”. The narrative was published posthumously, seventeen years after Chloe’s death. Also, the narrative of the memoir is in third person, which is the voice of the editor himself, although it claims to maintain “the statements from her own lips (9).” In one sense it amounts to the appropriation of the voice of a female slave by a male spokesperson of the civilizing mission. The narrative of Chloe Spear also unfurls the duplicity in the stance of the narrator who narrates Chloe’s tale in another way. On one hand, the narrative asserts that Chloe has acquired what every genuine Christian needs to experience to enter the heaven of holiness. But at the same time, the narrator posits Chloe as “an uncultivated African” alongside Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The narrative goes like this:

How dreadful then will it be in that solemn day, when we shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, should any, who may have read this little history, be found unprepared for his coming, while this *uncultivated African* shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the ransomed of the Lord out of every nation and people; forever to celebrate Redeeming Love! (45).

As Mrs. Chloe Spear looks back at her past through the lens of maturity, she

eventually thinks of her motherland, the African hinterland from where she had been abducted as a child. She thinks of it as a land devoid of any religious privileges. The violent erosion her native culture has undergone in her own mind can be interpreted as a classic example of the conditioning of slaves in institutionalized slavery. Spivak's concept of epistemic violence rings true here as Chloe becomes "a self immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonies (Morton 134)." The narrative refers to her native country as one with "destitution of religious privileges (Spear 61)." By defining the native land devoid of Christian religion, and the native as heathen, the imperial power surreptitiously caters to the civilizing mission of the imperialist agenda. In her fervent prayers, Chloe asked for divine grace so that "the light of divine truth might be conveyed to them, that they also, might believe and be saved (61)." This urge to enlighten the people back in Africa has many reverberations in contemporary Afro-American literary works. In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), the protagonist Celie's sister, Nettie, joins Samuel and Corrine as a missionary to spread the light of education in Africa. The agenda of civilizing mission thus shifts vehicles and traverses through tutored Africans in America who would go back and spread the light in the "Dark Continent".

The indoctrination of the image of the Christian God as a white man served as a backbone to the greater good of the civilizing mission. The white master was etched in the minds of slaves as no less than the Christian Lord himself. In Elizabeth's memoir, as she recollects, God appears as "a director, clothed in white raiment (Elizabeth 5)." This notion of a white God has survived in the collective memory of slaves for generations to come. Alice Walker in her essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" talks about Phillis Wheatley, a black slave woman of the late seventeenth century. She describes how Wheatley, being captured at the tender age of seven, was indoctrinated about her "rescue" from "savage" Africa. Walker critiques how the erasure of Wheatley's homeland from her memory lead to her "thwarted", "conflicted" position as a slave. The internalization of white supremacy in Wheatley's naïve mind got a vent through her poetic genius wherein she conjured up her white mistress as "the Goddess", whom she poetically referred to as Liberty. The reason for this psychologically violent replacement was "She took the imagery from one thing she saw elevated above all others (Walker 185)." The systematic indoctrination of the knowledge of the western religion violently erases the presence of any native knowledge and belief systems so that its power remains unchallenged. Moreover, Wheatley had no option of taking recourse to any native religious belief system as the white masters had instilled in her impressionable mind the "savagery of Africa from which she was rescued (Walker 185)."

The narrative of freedom also surreptitiously entailed debasing of black individuals, thus relegating the black people to the periphery in the discourse of religion. Patrick

Brantlinger in his essay “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of Dark Continent (1985)” espouses that “[though] the negro was legally freed, but in the British [white master’s] mind, he was still mentally and physically a slave (Bratlinger 187).”

The second narrative analysed in this paper, *Memoir of Old Elizabeth: A Coloured Woman* (1863), is in the first person. The invisible narrator states in the very beginning that it was “taken mainly from her own lips in her 97th year (3).” However, unlike the first narrative, *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear*, there is no editor’s introduction or third person narrative intervention here.

Unlike Mrs. Chloe Spear, Old Elizabeth was born into slavery. She was born to parents who were both slaves in a plantation in Maryland. She received Christianity as a heritage from her parents. She was sold to another master when she was eleven years old. She felt very lonely and sad. Although denied permission by the overseer, she somehow mustered up enough courage to go back to her mother, an act of resistance for which her tender body had to undergo harrowing punishment. The estrangement, loneliness and abysmal sorrow inflicted upon slaves by their masters perhaps resulted in such acts of resistance. Little Elizabeth’s running back to her mother despite prohibition was perhaps the only trait of resistance she could have shown in her state of coercive submission.

In both the narratives, the moral enlightenment of the speakers seems to take center stage. Both narratives foreground the magnanimity of Christianity. Christianity bestows upon the speakers the grace of the Lord. Chloe even goes to the extent of claiming that God has made “even slavery an indirect means of great good (Spear 103).” The narrative further states, “Without any design on the part of those who have been engaged in the traffic, thousands, perhaps millions, have been brought under the sound of the gospel, and have repented, believed, and become the freeborn children of God (103).” Such narratives by foregrounding the moral upliftment of the slave woman attempts to render invisible the inhuman treatment meted out to her by the white master. This in a way highlights the fissure in the very agenda of writing slave narratives. Instead of reclaiming the individuality of the enslaved subject, such narratives end up glorifying the institution of Slavery.

In both narratives, there are ample silences about the intimate nuances of the self in a black woman slave. The vulnerabilities of being a female slave in a patriarchal and racist institution like slavery are subtly evaded in the texts. The motherhood attained by both the speakers is slightly touched upon in the narratives. Toni Morrison in the essay, “The Site of Memory (1995)” asserts that the slave narratives were equally a record of what must be forgotten about slavery as it is of what must be remembered: “In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to

alleviate it, they [slaves] were silent about many things, and they ‘forgot’ many other things (Morrison 91).”

The politics of erasure played an astute part in channelizing the narratives written by female slaves. The narrative of rape was camouflaged into a rhetoric of “white male-adultery (hooks, *Ain’t I a woman?* 27) ” wherein the onus was completely shifted onto the black slave woman. The nineteenth century Victorian prohibitions monitored the narratives, for unmonitored narratives would have been detrimental to the agenda of immaculate white Enlightenment. Thus many of the narratives by women slaves are marked by interspersed exclusions. In the narrative of Mrs. Chloe Spear, the preface sets the tone of the whole narrative. It categorically states that “the immediate design of the writer was to make more extensively known the grace and mercy of God and the power of Gospel (5).” Similarly, in Elizabeth’s memoir, the first line states that “In the following narrative of Old Elizabeth, which was taken mainly from her own lips in her ninety-seventh year, her *simple language* has been adhered to as strictly as was *consistent* with perspicuity and *propriety* (Elizabeth 3).” Here “propriety” thwarts the possibility of uninhibited recounting of Elizabeth’s past, while the interjection of propriety monitors the whole course of the narrative.

The narratives by woman slaves, to some extent, become extensions of the white master’s (Christianity’s) discourse of supremacy. The selective exclusions in the name of “design of God” and “propriety” serve the purpose of what Audrey Lorde’s essay titles “master’s tool [which] will not dismantle the master’s house”. Lorde’s moment of truth in the essay holds true for the narratives by Mrs Chloe Spear and Old Elizabeth, i.e., “it is the real connection which is so feared by the patriarchal world (Lorde 111).” The actual revelations of a slave’s life, particularly that of a female slave, would certainly contest the twin citadel of white supremacist patriarchy and Christianity. So the moment of truth, the real revelations about the harrowing trials of slavery for a female slave, gets monitored and tailored in the two narratives keeping in mind the “propriety” of the white master’s civilized society.

And it is this reality which is in turn shaped by dominant discourses. Michel Foucault’s idea of discourse unfurls the duality of discourses. Foucault in *History of Sexuality* argues that “discourses can be both an instrument and an effect of power . . . discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (Foucault 100-101).” The silenced narratives by slave women thus become an effect as well as an instrument of Christian nourishment. Sarah Mills, in the book *Routledge Critical Thinker Michel Foucault* delineates that “discourses should be seen as a system which structure the way we perceive reality. Discourses are regulated by a set of rules which lead to the distribution of certain utterances and statements (54).” Thus the “filtered” slave

narratives act as a subordinate narrative within the apparent Christian slave narrative. Thus these narratives, functioning within the double bind of a racist-sexist social matrix, echoed the thwarted voices of black woman slaves while simultaneously supporting the perpetuation of a hegemonic Christian discourse with its surreptitious yet monstrous capacity to inject the stereotypical image of the “uncultivated heathen” in the collective memory of African-American people.

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The Dilemma of the Marginalized: Deciphering the Unheard Voices in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Sajna P.

“The position that only the subaltern can know the subaltern, only women can know women and so on, cannot be held as a theoretical presupposition either, for it predicates the possibility of knowledge on identity. Whatever the political necessity for holding the position, and whatever the advisability for attempting to ‘identify’ (with) the other as subject in order to know her, knowledge is made possible and sustained by irreducible difference, not identity.”

(Gamble, 48)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* containing a refined yet powerful feminist message, is the tale of a family in postcolonial Nigeria told from the eyes of Kambili, a young female. The head of the family, Eugene, the dominating father, a powerful business and religious extremist, is abusive and controls his wife Beatrice and two children Kambili and Jaja. The story addresses some of the important postcolonial discourses concerned with violence against women, the silencing of victims, the domestic sphere and the multiple expressions of postcolonial feminism.

The opening lines of *Purple Hibiscus* are a threat to persistent co-existence of the family members as a result of lack of free space. The violence committed by Eugene is in fact a technique of representing power by silencing the victims. His rage is accompanied by physical torture and mental agony. The novel begins citing the effect of Eugene's anger in the household. His anger wounded not only the show pieces at home, but terrified the minds of his wife and children.

Papa ... picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but hit the glass étagère, which Mama polished often. It cracked the top shelf, swept the beige, finger-size ceramic figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures to the hard floor and then landed after them. Or rather it landed on their many pieces... She stared at the figurine pieces on the floor and then knelt and started to pick them up with her bare hands...

The silence was broken only by the whirl of the ceiling fan as it sliced through the still air... I felt suffocated... Even the glass dining table was moving toward me (7).

When he was ten, he had missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class. Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja, in tears, came out supporting his left hand with his right... Jaja told me that Papa had avoided his right hand because it is the hand he writes with. (145)

Nelly P. Stromquist confides that women are placed in “inescapable domestic servitude” which results in “strict supervision of women’s movement outside the home”. Throughout the novel it is only Eugene who has the power of decision-making in the tiniest matter. When Kevin brings samples of fabric for the new curtains, Mama chooses one. However, the final decision was to be made by Eugene. Neither Jaja nor Kambili had any right on their own life. Eugene chose Kambili’s confirmation name-Ruth. When everybody passed a good comment on the sample drink brought from one of Eugene’s factories, Jaja had “nothing to say” (13). Once, Jaja left the dinner table before their Papa had said the prayer after meals and Kambili felt that “the compound walls would crumble... The sky would cave in” (14).

In traditional constructions, women are defined through their wedlocks and the only social reality associated with women is their labour as a ‘domestic worker’. Beatrice expresses feelings of limitation in her life and resigns herself to her dependency on Eugene. Her “rubber slippers never made a sound on the stairs” and Kambili knew that her Mama went downstairs only when she “heard the dining room door open” (10). “There were never tears on her face” (10). Nelly in her article “Women and Literacy” further adds that a serious form of men’s control over women is wife-beating (57). She asserts that man’s dominance over woman is a result of “men’s control of women’s sexuality” (Nelly, 56). Though Beatrice was exposed to brutal violence by her husband, she was silenced by prioritising social commitment. Kambili describes the day when she had seen her Mama’s swollen eye bearing the black-purple colour of an overripe avocado. Her identity is not easily defined, apart from her family and the home. She is dependent and powerless. Kambili’s mother proved to be an ideal wife in the social order. She assures that her household is undisturbed and willingly submits to the domestic activities linked to “feminine” characteristics. She usually spoke very little except when she had told Kambili about the goodness of Papa thus:

You know after you came and I had the miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper... sent people to your father to

urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out like Mr. Ezendu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us. (20)

Apart from the socially constructed identity that women possess merely as a wage less worker, religion too checks her freedom to a major extent. Auntie Ifeoma, later on tries to make Beatrice realize the truth regarding Eugene, that it was her submissive behaviour that prevented her husband from taking another wife. Ifeoma says, "If Eugene had done that, he would have been the loser, not you" (75). Kambili too felt that her "Papa deserved praise for not choosing to have more sons with another woman... for not choosing to take a second wife" (20). She felt that her father was unique and comparing him with someone would soil him. In spite of the extreme brutalities faced at home, the father is held in high esteem by the family. The father happily manages his family ensuring that there is no opposition in any form and continues to practise his patriarchal dreams through willing submission of the family members.

When Beatrice got pregnant, Kambili could not even think of her parents together on the bed because the sign of peace at Mass was the only sign of affection between them. These incidents in the novel are instances of man's sexual control over women. The body itself serves as a subject for fulfilment of men's desire. She holds no power and has an invisible identity. Even her physical discomforts related to pregnancy were to be ignored before her husband's interests.

While visiting Father Benedict, Beatrice wanted to stay back in the car as her body was not feeling right. But Papa got furious. Consequently, she had to move out of the car. On reaching home, Papa remained quiet. However, "Swift, heavy thuds" were heard on her "parents' hand-carved bedroom door" (32).

The arrogance of her husband resulted in her miscarriage. The man seems to have a divine power over women. He has the right to sustain or damage or destroy life as his mood fluctuates. Eugene is least emotional and throughout the novel he is portrayed as a fierce father hitting every member of the family violently, whereas his wife is a silent victim falling prey to her husband's brutality. This is in line with what Spivak communicates- it is impossible to recover the voice of the oppressed. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak highlights that subjects are constructed through discourse and representation. "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow"

(Spivak, 243-61).

The analysis reveals the subjection of the children too in the hands of the father. He had strict schedules planned for his children and they seemed to lack a soul of their own. The children never dared to question their father's principles but silently moulded to his interests. The novel portrays Papa as a dictator who schedules the lives of his family thus:

Before, our driver, Kevin, would pick me up... and then we would drive over to get Jaja... and have lunch together when we got home. Now, because Jaja was in the new gifted student program... he attended after-school lessons. Papa had revised his schedule but not mine, and I could not wait to have lunch with him. I was to have had lunch, taken my siesta, and started studying by the time Jaja came home... She wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler. (22-23)

When Kambili came second in class, she knew that "Papa would not be proud... he did not spend money to have us let other children come first" (39) and she "was stained by failure". Kambili was greatly bound to Papa's chores. She was not allowed to keep the driver waiting after her class. "Once, Kevin told Papa I took a few minutes longer, and Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears for days"(51). She told her friends that she liked running when they complained her of being "backyard snob".

According to Jane Bryce, "Kambili's story is one of disquieting domestic horror, with a father who, while maintaining the love and respect of his community, beats and tortures his wife and children to a point where his wife is driven to an irrevocable act of self-defence"(58).

The religious policies followed by Eugene were given utmost priority rather than the cyclic variations in the female. On the day of Mass, Kambili had a cramp and Beatrice asked her to eat some food so that she could take medicine. But, the fast mandated that the faithful not eat solid food an hour before Mass. However, Jaja poured the cereal so that she could eat while their father was with the visitors. Unfortunately, he found her eating and turned furious. "Has the devil built a tent in my

house?”(102).He unbuckled his belt and lashed Jaja, Kambili and Mama. Eugene had mechanical control over his family and they seemed to have been prevented from taking a breath without his approval. He never cared for his families’ thoughts and desires but manifested his desires through them.

Beatrice had been told by Eugene that it was sinful to bow before the Igwe because he had still let his pagan relatives carry out sacrifices in his palace. He had considered it an ungodly tradition to bow to another human being. Inspired by her father’s ideals, Kambili did not kneel before the bishop. But he yanked her in the ear and said that she “did not have a spirit of discernment” (94). Though the father is depicted as a giant-figure before the reader, the daughter, Kambili, tries her best to impress her father and finds no fault in him. The mother moulds her in such a manner that he is divine and infallible.

Eugene had cut off ties with his own father for being a pagan. He permits Jaja and Kambili to visit their grandfather, Papa- Nnukwu, but only after giving them certain guidelines. “... don’t touch any food. Don’t drink anything. And, as usual, you will stay not longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes” (61). Jaja and Kambili were asked to pray for forgiveness for spending twenty-five minutes with their grandfather. Auntie Ifeoma had stopped speaking to Eugene after Papa-Nnukwu was barred from visiting home. The indifferent attitude of Eugene on the death of his father seemed natural. On the other hand, he was very proud of their maternal grandfather.

Auntie Ifeoma always addressed Mama “*Nwunye m*” which meant ‘my wife’. But Eugene considered it as “the remnants of ungodly traditions, the idea that it was the family and not the man alone that married a wife”. Later Beatrice whispered, “I am her wife, too, because I am your father’s wife. It shows that she accepts me” (73).

The unjust division of labour prevailing in the African society is justified by male actions. The treatment of women as subordinate creatures will cease only when traditional concepts regarding women are wiped off from the brains of, not only the male, but female population too. Eugene’s father has no grudge towards his son for the ill-treatment received, but blames himself for having sent him to a missionary school. On the other hand, he tells his daughter that it is her responsibility to look after her father despite being an employee. Papa Nnukwu felt sorry that he had lost Eugene as he was educated in a missionary school. But Auntie Ifeoma retorts by saying that it is not the fault with missionaries as she too had been to such a school. To this Papa-Nnukwu adds, “But you are a woman. You do not count” (83). He believes that his spirits will haunt her if she does not look after him. The female is always associated with the domestic sphere and their ability is analysed on the basis of their roles performed as wives, mothers and grandmother. Tradition ties women with domestic

identity and her life is centred on her home and her father, mother and children. She is reluctant to stay home engaging in household chores even if well educated. She can dream of earning a living only after fulfilling her domestic responsibilities which is, unfortunately, endless. Women lack an identity and seemed to count nowhere though they are required everywhere- from household management to man's mental support. Haleh Ashfar asserts that it would be impossible to consider "that all women are oppressed by all men. The need to forge commonality across difference through alliances and coalitions becomes a key issue within feminism" (10). She ascertains that the traditional role ascribed to many women in the domestic sphere as mothers and household managers prevent them from engaging in activities in the public sphere. According to Walby, radical feminists have assumed Patriarchy to be universal and unchanging and have not analysed the impact of class and "race" on gender. Walby proclaims that Patriarchy is indispensable for an understanding of gender inequality and she suggests six "key patriarchal structures which restrict women and help to maintain male domination."

The relation between Beatrice and Auntie Ifeoma is pictured as divine. The only suggestion the former makes before her husband is regarding sending a few gas cylinders to Auntie when her children were being sent to her place for five days.

"I thought maybe you might send one or two gas cylinders to her from the factory."

"Is that what you and Ifeoma planned?"

"*Kpa*, I am just making a suggestion. It is up to you to decide."

The children were thrilled as "It was the first time" they "would be sleeping outside home without Papa... five days without Papa's voice, without his footsteps on the stairs." (108). The life away from their father turned out to bear the first seeds of freedom. On the first day, Kambili looked like a "strange laboratory animal to be explained and catalogued" (118). She found it difficult as the air was free to breathe as one wished unlike the atmosphere back home. Auntie Ifeoma asked the children to live a schedule free life. "I felt as if my shadow were visiting Auntie Ifeoma and her family, while the real me was studying in my room in Enugu, my schedule posted above me" (125). Laughter seemed to flow around the walls of the house. "Jaja smiled so widely I saw dimples I did not even know he had" (147). When the children were brought back home, they realized that "living room had too much empty space, too much wasted marble... and housed nothing... Our furniture was lifeless" (192).

Eugene punished Kambili and Jaja for not informing him about Papa-Nnukwu's visit at Auntie Ifeoma's house. Jaja, Kambili and mother were beaten to death when he found the painting of Papa-Nnukwu gifted to Kambili by Amaka.

You should not see sin and walk right into it. He lowered the

kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen... I saw the moist steam before I saw the water.... (194)

To Jane Bryce, “The novel offers two possible alternatives to patriarchal violence: Mama’s passive aggression, and Auntie Ifeoma’s happy, harmonious family in Nsukka, where she struggles as a low paid academic” (58). Auntie Ifeoma represents “a strong woman” (237). However, in the latter part of the story Beatrice possesses a new spirit and she goes back to Auntie Ifeoma’s house from the hospital. “You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, *nne*? Your father broke it on my belly... My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it” (248) But finally she is forced to go back to her husband, “Where would I go if I leave Eugene’s house?” (250). For Doyle, mothering allows for the regulation of women’s bodies as the boundary for the cultivation of the modern self, which was perceived as pure and homogenous. As bordered bodies, women incorporate and exclude; they have the responsibility of guaranteeing identity for the patriarchal order. To escape this order can be perceived as sexual transgression and the reason the woman’s body must be subjected to masculine regulation.

Kambili examines the past to discover the reason behind the ‘sinfulness’ at home.

Auntie Ifeoma’s little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja’s defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do. (15-16)

The stalks of purple hibiscus that Jaja brought while returning from Auntie Ifeoma’s house, seemed to have overturned power. Jaja and Kambili decided to visit Auntie Ifeoma when they were informed about her termination, without waiting for their father’s consent.. “We are going to Nsukka today, not tomorrow. If Kevin will not take us, we will still go. We will walk if we have to” (261). The children realize the experience of being free when they stayed at the house of Aunt Ifeoma. They learn to live, engage in merry-making and take decisions. They could not withstand the restrictions imposed upon them by their father unnecessarily. The children realize the essence of freedom.

Trinh Minh-Ha affirms that hegemony works at knocking down differences and at standardizing contexts and expectations in the smallest details of daily lives. Divide

and conquer has for centuries been man's creed, his formula of success. But a different terrain of consciousness has been explored in which clear cut divisions and dualistic oppositions such as science vs. subjectivity, masculine vs. feminine, may serve as departure points for analytical purpose but are no longer satisfactory if not entirely untenable to the critical mind.

Beatrice represents a typical postcolonial woman who submits herself to domesticity. However she uses her domesticity to manifest her empowerment. Eventually, she uses her role as a food manager to kill her husband. The interesting fact is that Beatrice remained "silent" even in her attempt to silence her husband forever. She had no control over anything except the foodstuffs at home. The irony is that she used 'tea' to poison her husband which contained his 'love sip' for his family. She had no choice left but to use the foodstuff to put an end to her husband's life and liberate herself from domestic chains. The control she exercises adds a new dimension to her character, moving her beyond "voiceless female" towards "empowered woman" without breaking her silence. When Beatrice phones to inform father's death, Kambili is shocked because to her "he had seemed immortal" (287). Tunca remarks that Kambili had found "herself unable to bridge the chasm between the ideology her father has instilled into her and her own visual experiences" (125).

The novel ends with the words, "The new rains will come down soon" (307). These rains may be showered by God and may smell of freedom of women giving them an identity of their and not on the basis of their association with men or domestic duties.

As Nfah-Abbenyi proclaims, "the female characters in these women's writing are portrayed not in stereotypical subservient, unchanging roles, or in roles that are deliberately limiting. Instead, they come alive as speaking subjects and agents for change" (151).

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Transcending Gender Hierarchy: A Study of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

Shruti Lahiri

“I didn’t want to be discriminated against because of my gender and status. I promised myself I was never going to be treated as a second- class citizen.”

—Binaca Jagger

Gender is an age-old concept. This concept has been inextricably intertwined with questions regarding the generation of the universe since the time of Pre Socrates and Plato. In myths, gender has been accounted as not a contrary pull between a male and a female, but seen as two polarities, tendencies or principles- two kinds or modes. The opposition between the masculine and the feminine extends far beyond the relation between men and women. It is one of the most common figures for thinking about the basic differences from which all life emerges.

Gender is the social construction of sex, while sex is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female, Gender refers to the social classification in “masculine” and “feminine”. It implies cultural differentiation into kinds- that allows us to think of distinctly different bodies.

Gender has been defined in two contrary ways by two groups of theorists: the theory of “the social construction of reality” set up by the social constructivists and the theory set up by the essentialists. For the social constructivists (like Earnest von Glasersfeld and A. Sullivan Palincsar) gender is determined by cultural expectations, divisions, relations, discourse, perceptions and embedded beliefs. We see a human being as male or female because of the language we speak and the beliefs we inhabit.

Just contrary to the social constructivists, the essentialists (such as Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus) insist that maleness and femaleness are not just categories or representations imposed upon the world. The world consists of essences or what something intrinsically is. We may know those essences through language, perception, culture or representation, but what something is remains the same regardless of our knowledge and perception.

Ancient or pre-modern thought, as propounded by Plato and Aristotle differentiated gender through matter-form binary. In the debate about the relation between sex and

gender, sex is understood as the unchanging matter upon which the social forms of gender are laid. Form is active, disembodied and knowable power which gives being sense and order to an otherwise chaotic, passive, undifferentiated and inessential matter, which has only potential being. Form is the fathering, stronger and determining force that gives shape to a feminine, passive and acquiescent matter. It impregnates matter, because the chaotic stuff requires the active insemination of form. Women's bodies contribute the material element, a seed that is mere stuff, while the male body in creation plays the role of God-like artificer, shaping matter, giving it life and force. Female bodies contribute the passive and meaningless stuff, which is endowed with life in the act of procreation. From this it is an obvious deduction that the women are weaker and inferior which in turn confirms their age-old political, social and cultural subordination in a male-dominated world. This movement of matter towards its real form creates a political hierarchy of levels and resemblances: women must be to men what men must be to God. Just as men strive to achieve a position of pure reason and active self-determination, so also women need to defer to male reason- not because women are essentially irrational but because the essence of human life –reason-is exemplified in men.

Modern thought defines gender according to nature-culture distinction. Nature is the domain of chaos, brute need, biological determinism and necessity, while culture has the capacity to order, civilize and temper the violence of need. Culture divides, orders, penetrates and illuminates an otherwise inert nature. Nature is feminized while culture is described using male imagery.

This hierarchical way of thinking about gender was given a moral reflection by Christian theologians. A dichotomy was imagined between a corrupt and fallen body and a pure and intact soul. It was proclaimed and accepted by all that this conflict is more evident in women, whose weaker wills and stronger sense of their own bodies allow reason to be led astray. It was also assumed that women, because of the attractiveness of their bodies and weaker wills detract male reason from its spiritual goal and ascendance to God. Hence, the difference in gender that is the difference between masculinity and femininity was defined in terms of having various degree of rationality or spiritualism.

Such age-old speculations have given birth to a rich corpus of gender-studies in English Literature. The study has especially earned an important place in the social drama of the Indian playwrights. As for instance, gender occupies a major space in the plays of Mahesh Dattani, who like Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, adds to the exalted list of playwrights, responsible in shaping and vitalizing contemporary Indian theatre. Regarding the focus of interest in his plays, Dattani himself admits:

...it has to do with my own comfort with both the feminine

and the masculine self in me...the masculine self is very content; it doesn't need to express itself. But the feminine self seems to seek expression (Katyal).

A.Katyal asserts in his article "Of Page and Stage: An Interview with Mahesh Dattani" that the playwright seems to fight for his "feminine self". In Dattani's terms "And since I have the male self, which is equipped to fight as well, it is a proportionate battle. The feminine self is not a victim in my plays. It's subsumed, yes, it's marginalized, but it fights back" (Katyal 2000).

In this paper, it remains my intention first to unfold how in *Tara* Dattani has treated the perpetual problem of female subjugation and victimization working in the urban space of Indian family unit and secondly how he has transcended this problem by introducing the all enveloping symbol of the androgyne in the play.

Tara is a play of self-fragmentation, the male denying the female, and of the cultural construct of gender which favours the male. It centres round a conflict which arises when Chandan and Tara, the conjoined twins are separated by the eminent Dr Thakkar, who provides each of them with a separate identity. But this separation leads to an emotional estrangement between the twins who were comfortably residing in one womb. They represent a totality, a single genderless personality: "Maybe God never wanted us separated". But the tragedy is: "Destiny desires strange things...But even God does not always get what he wants. Conflict is the crux of life" (Act I).

Samipendra Banerjee has rightly pointed out that "*Tara* is one of Dattani's best plays because of its ability to project the many facades of identity and its necessary counterpart- 'otherness'" (Banerjee 254). We may in this context be reminded of Simone de Beauvoir's remarks on this "otherness" in *The Second Sex*:

The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality- that of the Self and the Other...Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought.

This category of the other, as Beauvoir points out, is the woman or rather the construct of the woman. In Dattani's play, Tara is the "other" of Chandan and through him the "other" to those institutional and social forces that validate that "otherness". It is the process of "becoming" of this "other" that Tara explains to Roopa:

Tara: The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave (Act 1).

Tara's future is doomed by virtue of her gender. She is denied of the leg against the better judgment of everybody, though it legitimately belongs to her. The parents and

the doctor are ruled by the parochial concept of patriarchy that the male child will better their lives. Tara's mother, Bharati knows the travails a physically handicapped girl might have to face in future, yet she does not have the voice to protest. She confesses to her son:

Bharati: Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you- but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty (Act1).

Even Chandan admits: She deserves something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature (Act1).

The play generates a death-like response from Tara when she learns the truth- that she is discriminated because of her gender, but not by her father, but by her mother, whose decision deprived her of what she wanted more than anything else in the world- a second leg. Patel's attitude towards Tara is also negative. The fact that the male is given the greater chance is obvious from Patel's planning for Chandan's education and future career. But there is no consideration whatsoever for Tara's feelings.

Patel: Chandan is to study further and he will go abroad for higher studies.

Bharati: And Tara?

Patel: When have you ever allowed me to make my plans for her?(Act 1)

When Chandan enquires Bharati if she has any future plans for Tara, she replies:

Bharati: Yes, I plan for her happiness, I mean to give her all love and affection which I can give.

Its what she deserves...can make up for lot.(Act 1)

Even Dr Thakkar belied his godly position and led himself to be bribed by Bharati's father into becoming an accomplice in the bizarre act of severing the leg from Tara's body. Chandan and Tara's maternal grandfather was a wealthy man. He was in politics and came very close to becoming the Chief Minister. Bharati's father had strengthened his indulgence for the male grandchild by leaving his property after his demise to Chandan and not a single penny to Tara. Tara becomes thus the victim of the collective social system. Her potential is sacrificed on the altar of gender. Identity crisis becomes a chain with which a female is fettered when the question of choice between the male and the female arises. The desperate Tara cries out:

Tara: Oh, what a waste! A waste of money. Why spend all the money to keep me alive? It cannot matter whether I live or die. There are thousands of poor sick people on the roads who could be given care and attention, and I think

I know what I will make of myself. I will be a carer for those people. I...I will spend the rest of my life feeding and clothing those...starving naked millions everyone is talking about. Maybe I can start an institution that will...do all that. Or I could join Mother Teresa and sacrifice myself to a great cause (Act II).

The injustices done to her in her small personal life motivates her to empower herself and fight against the broader social injustices and discrimination. But this determination is too short-lived. Tara soon sinks into a well of despair and sorrow.

Tara: How do you expect me to feel anything for anyone if they don't give me any feeling to begin with? Why is it wrong for me to be without feeling? Why are you asking me to do something that nobody has done for me? (Act II)

Mahesh Dattani's plays focus on actual life problems. They not only bring up gender issues and issues regarding the liberty fixed to women in a patriarchal society, but they also deal with gender biases and prejudices which influence the lives of girl-children among middle-class educated society. Dattani once remarked:

The function of the drama, in my opinion is not merely to reflect the malfunction of the society but to act like freak mirrors in a carnival and to project grotesque images of all that passes for normal in our world. It is ugly but funny (Elizabeth Roy, "Freak Mirrors and the Grotesque Image", *The Hindu*, 15th March, 2002).

In the second half of my paper I will now speculate how in this play, Dattani makes the principle of androgyny work as a counter-force to the social system of gender segregation. Society discriminates between a boy and a girl but the androgynous principle tries to amalgamate the two. I feel that *Tara* deftly illustrates the interplay of these forces to create a two-layered world: the external world where the female is set apart and segregated from the male and the internal world of the psyche where the male and the female cannot tolerate any segregation from each other.

Erwin Mee has rightly observed in his note on the play that "Dattani sees *Tara* as a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favours what is male..." He makes yet another significant remark in the same note: "...Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara's story. Dan writes Tara's story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole". In this context, I am here reminded of the description of the androgyne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

As when a gardener grafts a branch on to a tree and sees
the two unite as they grow, and come to maturity together,

so when their limbs met in that single embrace the nymph
and the boy were no longer two, but a single form, possessed
of a dual nature, which could not be called male or female,
but seemed to be at once both and neither. (Ovid 104)

Dr Thakkar's description of the physical conjoinment of the Siamese twins is no different from the Ovidian elaboration of the androgyne:

Dr Thakkar: You see, they were twins...conjoined twins are quite rare...a conjoinment...from the breastbone down through the pelvic area (Act I).

Dr Thakkar is seconded by Dan himself.

Dan: Two tiny smaller-than-life babies, hugging each other. (Act III).

It is noteworthy that the phrase "single embrace" in Ovid's quotation is significantly echoed in the phrase "hugging each other".

A much more modern psychological explanation of androgyny, I find in Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the archetypes of anima/animus principles as working in human being's nature. Jung asserted that the mind can never be of one fixed gender. The anima is the personification of all female psychological tendencies within a man, while the Animus is the personification of all masculine tendencies within a woman. Thus the model sets a psychological task of getting in contact with this "other". This also necessitates the uniform coexistence of the male and the female in nature, and the absence of any one of the two may lead to severe imbalance. In his trance-like memorization, Dan confesses: "...I didn't forget her. She was lying deep inside, out of reach" (Act I) and Tara too affirms: "...Maybe we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out" (Act I). Dan's point-blank refusal to go to college without Tara serves as an outright rejection of society's effort to segregate and promote the male over the female.

Chandan: I don't want to go to college. *Not without Tara*. If she's going in for surgery, I'll miss a year too (Act I).

Chandan sticks to his decision and reiterates it again and again. It is his inner self who proclaims:

Chandan: I will not go to college without Tara....If she isn't, I am not going either...*We* will *both* stay at home as usual (Act II)

Tara too brushes aside any discrimination that society imposes upon her and her brother: "It's all the same. You. Me. There's no difference" (Act II) and Chandan happily condescends: "That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me" (Act II). Society believes in "separation", pushing "apart", "operation", but androgyny perceives in

wholeness and unity the fountain- spring of life. It is this dichotomous pull between these two strands that constitute the unique fabric of the play *Tara*.

But once society disclaims the androgynous entity of Chandan and Tara, Tara pines away and dies. She becomes convinced of the fact that “she was not really loved the way she thought she was” (Mee 19). With Tara’s eventual death, Chandan moves to London and cuts his name short into Dan. It is a shift that is symbolic of his decision to forego all ties with the past, even his past identity. Chandan has failed to realize that his frustrations are due to his trying to repress his memories, of obliterating his “other self, ‘the self that hitherto lay deep inside, out of reach’”. It is his discarding of the other self that leads to the tragic conclusion of the play. Dan’s disintegration points to the futility of the united self in the context of a post-modernist world.

Tara celebrates the androgynous communion of the masculine and the feminine selves. It sees far beyond to reach up to a single all comprehensive unified personality, which nullifies and engulfs all contradiction within its single entity. It is a golden ideal that *Tara* seeks to establish in the face of the innumerable attempts of society to demolish it.

Early conceptualizations of well demarcated masculinity and femininity are now being replaced by the increasing popularity of the idea of androgyny. In 1973, Anne Constantinople published a critique questioning the undimensionality of masculinity and femininity. In response to this critique, new sex role orientation measures were developed that redefined the way masculinity and femininity were conceptualized. In post-modernist and post-structuralist approaches, the very idea of “men” and “women” as discrete and unitary categories is challenged. It was from the 1990s that the androgyne received renewed attention in the mainstream press when it was characterized as a “new sexual identity” that would forever change the traditional notion of gender. Because of the sustained prominence and inclusion of the androgynous human beings in the formerly lesbian and gay campus and community organizations over the past decade, people in the early twenty-first century generally have a much greater awareness regarding their existence. As a result, more youths today are openly identified as androgynes or bisexuals and one yet they do not need to be singled as ones belonging to the queer community as did many of their predecessors. The recent situation is even more hopeful. In a historic judgment on the 15th of April, 2014 the Supreme Court acknowledged transgenders as a third gender who are neither males nor females. It has been directed by the government to ensure that “they would get job reservation and facilities, including a voter card, passport and driving licence...Expressing concern over transgenders being harassed and discriminated in society, the bench passed a slew of directions for their social welfare. It is also said they are citizens of the country and have equal rights to education, health care and

employment opportunities like other people belonging to male and female gender” (*The Statesman*, 16 April 2014).

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Immolated Woman, Mutilated Man: Marginalized by Gender in *The God of Small Things*

Sourav Pal

Ammu and the Ritual of 'Sati'

Ania Loomba in her essay "Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Postcolonial Writings on Widow Immolation in India" describes the ritual of widow immolation or the burning of the "Sati" practised among the Hindus in colonial India as "one of the most spectacular forms of patriarchal violence" that "is both produced by and helps to validate and circulate other ideologies that strengthen the oppression of women" (241-42). Loomba refers to a number of texts and viewers' descriptions of the ritual actually taking place to bring out the ideologies and the hidden motives behind this practice. First, the supporters of this ritual always hailed the burning widow as an exemplary woman, a paragon of chastity and devotion to her husband, a woman who is "marked off from all other women by her will; thus her desire, her 'decisions' are to be revered by the community even as theirs are consistently erased" (242). This is what the word 'Sati' actually means – 'a chaste or pure woman'. A number of recent writers, for example, Ashis Nandy in his essay "Sati: A Nineteenth Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest", read in this ideology of widow immolation a manifestation of the male anxiety about female sexuality. A woman who is widowed at an early age is naturally prone to physical passions like any normal human being. She is young and man-less, and is therefore object of others' sexual desires too. She is not dominated by a single man as it is the case with married women in a traditional Hindu society, and is therefore comparatively less bound by the rigorous norms that bind the lives of women in this society. Her sexuality is thus dangerous to the patriarchal society and its notion of 'chastity', and needs to be curbed. Widow immolation is a convenient means of doing that on religious and moral grounds, presenting the woman as voluntarily choosing to accompany her husband even in death instead of accepting a life without him. Thus widow immolation becomes compatible with the patriarchal version of a good Hindu wife who is the very embodiment of Indianness and tradition.

The second reason behind widow immolation is economic. The existence of a widow in the family after her husband's death complicates the question of inheritance. The widow has a claim, however feeble, to her husband's property, or at least she is a life-long dependent who must be looked after. She is neither welcome in her husband's

house, nor in her father's. Loomba refers to Thapar to suggest "a correlation between the rise of sati and the decline of *niyoga* or the practice of a widow being married to her dead husband's brother; widow immolation reduced the possibilities of women marrying others within the family, or outsiders, and thus creating complications regarding inheritance" (243). Widow immolation can be seen as a convenient means of wiping out these economic complications without ever showing the real motives behind it. More importantly, this is a murder that gets sanctioned by the society and its various institutions and goes unpunished. That widow immolation is not merely a residue of a remote colonial past and can be seen as the outcome of a distinctly specifiable economic, political, social situation and patriarchal psychology even in modern times, is proved by the burning of Roop Kanwar, who was neither uneducated nor a simple embodiment of rural femininity, in the village of Deorala, Rajasthan, as recently as in October 1987. The event and the economic and political advantage that a section of the regional elite tried to gain from it shows the marginalized position that the women still occupy in the Indian society.

In the light of the above discussion we shall try to analyze the predicament of Ammu in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Of course, Ammu is not a widow; she is divorced from her husband. But in the collective opposition of the various social and legal institutions along with her family against her relationship with Velutha and in her annihilation at the end of the novel we find the same patriarchal anxiety about female sexuality that is operative in widow immolation. Ammu's very marriage was a desperate move on her part to escape her wretched life in Ayemenem under a rank patriarch – her vain, dominating, cruel and extremely jealous father. She was even denied a college education on account of its being an unnecessary expense for a girl while her brother was sent to Oxford for study. But her decision to find solace in another man was a suicidal jump from the frying pan into the fire as she found her husband an incorrigible alcoholic who tried to save his job by sending her to his boss. So "Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams" (Roy 42). But young and frustrated, she had a suppressed desire for loving and to be loved that gave her an 'unsafe edge' and made her wish to violate all norms and restrictions set by society:

On days like this, there was something restless and untamed about her as though she had temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorcehood. Even her walk changed from a safe mother-walk to another wilder sort of walk. She wore flowers in her hair and carried magic secrets in her eyes. She spoke to no one. She spent hours on the riverbank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a

tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims.
(Roy 44)

The author beautifully describes her psychology which motivated her rebellion and made her dangerous to the patriarchal image of a 'good Hindu woman' set in the traditional Keralite society:

What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? This air of unpredictability? It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day. (Roy 44)

So Ammu's rebellion and her independent exercise of her sexuality both needed to be repressed. And the various mechanisms of patriarchy including politics, religion, the police and the family went hand in hand in this mission.

There are two other major characters in this novel that are marginalized by patriarchy. Mammachi is one who spent her whole life enduring the brutality of an ill-tempered husband. Pappachi was a jealous man who always greatly resented any little attention that his wife received. So her talent in violin was nipped in the bud. This grew when after his retirement Mammachi started her pickle business. He needed to prove himself still the boss to his working wife: "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river" (Roy 48). Another woman who was leading a frustrated life in the Ayemenem household was Baby Kochamma. In her youth she fell in love with a young Irish monk Father Mulligan, but could not express her love for obvious reasons – the restrictions set on a woman in a traditional social set up. Following the monk she entered a convent in Madras as a trainee novice. But equally frustrated there she came back to the material world of Ayemenem only to find that nobody was now willing to marry her for her religious 'reputation'. The only way left to her was to live the life of a bitter spinster with the family throughout her life.

But instead of showing oneness in their marginalization these two women are bitterly opposed to Ammu's relationship with Velutha. Though themselves victims of patriarchy, now they become its torchbearers with a kind of revengeful motive. Of course, they have their different personal reasons. Mammachi was extremely jealous of the reputation and social position of her husband's family and at the same time immensely proud of her upper caste standing. Previously she had sanctioned her son's sexual liaisons with the factory girls on account of 'men's needs'. But she could not do so in case of her daughter. Daughters are emblem of the honour of the family, as

her long years within a patriarchal social set up have taught her. Ammu's relationship with Velutha, an untouchable, now defamed her family forever, she believed:

Her tolerance of 'Men's Needs' as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding (The Little Blessed One, blessed personally by the Patriarch of Antioch, an Imperial Entomologist, a Rhodes Scholar from Oxford) and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, *for ever* now people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They'd nudge and whisper. It was all finished now. Mammachi lost control. (Roy 258)

Baby Kochamma's reaction to Ammu's rebellion, on the other hand, is motivated by the rage that one victim feels for another bearing a common lot but not ready to succumb to it:

Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma. She had managed to persuade herself over the years that her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan had been entirely due to *her* restraint and *her* determination to do the right thing. (Roy 45)

Secondly, Baby Kochamma considered herself in a better position than Ammu because she was not a divorced daughter who came back to the family unwelcomed after the failure of an unsanctioned love marriage:

She subscribed whole-heartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a *divorced* daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a *divorced* daughter from a *love* marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from an *inter-community love* marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quivering silent on the subject. (Roy 45-46)

So when she saw Ammu's relationship with Velutha disclosed, she was delighted with the apprehension of Ammu's imminent fall and played her part perfectly to bring

it quick:

Baby Kochamma recognized at once the immense potential of the situation, but immediately anointed her thoughts with unctuous oils. She bloomed. She saw it as God's Way of punishing Ammu for her sins.... She set sail at once. A ship of goodness ploughing through a sea of sin. (Roy 257)

Ammu is thus not merely a victim of male anxiety about female sexuality, but of female sexual jealousy too. She had to pay the price for her rebellion against the 'love laws' formulated by society – "laws that lay down who should be loved, and how" – and indeed she paid it dearly (Roy 33). Her sexual abuse in the Police Station where she went to lodge her complaint shows how patriarchy threatens and punishes the violator of its laws, especially if it is a woman:

He [Inspector Thomas Mathew] stared at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from *veshyas* or their illegitimate children. Ammu said she'd see about that. Inspector Thomas Mathew came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton.

'If I were you,' he said, 'I'd go home quietly.' Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. *Tap, tap*. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he couldn't. Policemen have that instinct. (Roy 8)

Banished by the society and abandoned by her family, and battling between her desire to earn enough to bring her children back to her and her ill health, Ammu died a pathetic and lonely death in a strange room of a hotel in a strange town only amidst familiar fears:

She had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snicking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they'd caught in the bazaar – branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were. *Veshyas*. So that new policemen on the beat would have no trouble identifying whom to harass. Ammu always noticed them in the market, the women with vacant eyes and forcibly shaved heads in the land where

long, oiled hair was only for the morally upright.

That night in the lodge, Ammu sat up in the strange bed in the strange room in the strange town. She didn't know where she was, she recognized nothing around her. Only her fear was familiar. The faraway man inside her began to shout. This time the steely fist never loosened its grip. Shadows gathered like bats in the steep hollow near her collarbone. (Roy 161-62)

Even the Church refused to bury her so that she was cremated in the electric crematorium where nobody except "beggars, derelicts and the police-custody dead" were cremated: "People who died with nobody to lie at the back of them and talk to them" (Roy 162). Thus Ammu is immolated, symbolically as a sacrifice to patriarchy, a woman expressing her natural and spontaneous desires in the face of a male-dominated society and its 'love-laws':

The steel door of the incinerator went up and the muted hum of the eternal fire became a red roaring. The heat lunged out at them like a famished beast. Then Rahel's Ammu was fed to it. Her hair, her skin, her smile. Her voice. The way she used Kipling to love her children before putting them to bed: *We be of one blood, ye and I*. Her good night kiss. The way she held their faces steady with one hand (squashed-cheeked, fish-mouthed) while she parted and combed their hair with the other. The way she held knickers out for Rahel to climb into. *Left leg, right leg*. All this was fed to the beast, and it was satisfied.

She was their Ammu *and* their Baba and she had loved them Double. (Roy 163)

What role does Chako, Ammu's brother and the only grown up male in the family, play in Ammu's immolation? A secret tension always runs between them as decipherable from their cross-talks and insinuating repartees. The Rhodes Scholar and self-proclaimed Marxist seems to feel insecure from her divorcee sister who comes back to the family with her two children as a sharer of his ancestral property. That's why he reminds them again and again that Ammu had no 'Locusts Stand I' i.e. no claim to the property and the family business of pickle-making:

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chako, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as *my* factory, *my*

pineapples, *my* pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property. (Roy 57)

Hence, Chako's haughty and male-chauvinistic remark that "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (57). This also explains Ammu's destitution after the fatal events of Sophie Mol's death and Velutha's murder in Police custody:

Little Ammu.

.....

Who had to pack her bags and leave. Because she had no
Locusts Stand I. Because Chako said she had destroyed
enough already. (Roy 159)

Ammu thus becomes a victim of "Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify", of the "inchoate, unacknowledged fear – civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness" (Roy 308).

Velutha, a Man Caught in the Power-Game

The representation of a woman's utter powerlessness within a male-dominated system, however, receives a further twist in the delineation, within the story of Ammu's clandestine affair with Velutha, of an insidious power-game. The discussion on gender remains incomplete without reference to the element of sexual exploitation in Ammu's relationship with a man far below her station in life. Ammu, a loveless and man-less woman frustrated by the failure of her hasty marriage and the boredom and insignificance of her life being lived within a family that does not care for her, has a deep craving for love, both physical and emotional. But at the same time she has a deep-seated fear inside her heart that perhaps both her youth and life will pass her by, leaving little room for the romance of the spring or the joys of the summer. She imagines the 'specter of her future' mocking her in the mirror, 'Pickled, Grey, Rheumy-Eyed', and grows desperate with the shivering feeling that "...Life had been Lived. That her cup was full of dust. That the air, the sky, the trees, the sun, the rain, the light and darkness were all slowly turning to sand" (Roy 222). But why does she choose Velutha as her secret lover? One reason may be that Velutha is an easy option for her, being a subordinate both by caste and social status, and easily available. He is one, she finds, who will not dominate her, rather will be on her side. But there is more to it than that. Ammu wants Velutha in a fellowship of anger against the self-righteous world which she finds so unbearable in its inequality and hypocrisy. She wants him to be in league with her in her defiance of its age-old order:

Suddenly Ammu hoped that it *had* been him that Rahel saw
in the march. She hoped it had been him that had raised his

flag and knotted arm in anger. She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness, he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against. (Roy 175-76)

She thus finds Velutha to be one with her both in their vulnerability and marginality and their rebellion against the world. And their way of rebellion is by getting involved in a relationship unsanctioned by society – a relationship that is a direct challenge against its ‘Love Laws’.

Ammu knows from the very beginning that their relationship is destined to bring doom on both:

It wasn't what lay at the end of her road that frightened Ammu as much as the nature of the road itself. No milestones marked its progress. No trees grew along it. No dappled shadows shaded it. No mists rolled over it. No birds circled it. No twists, no turns or hairpin bends obscured even momentarily, her clear view of the end. This filled Ammu with an awful dread, because she was not the kind of woman who wanted her future told. She dreaded it too much. (Roy 224)

Velutha is the one-armed man of her dream, ‘the god of small things’, helpless in his vulnerability to various social institutions and their law-makers, the gods of bigger things: “He had no other arm with which to fight the shadows that flickered around him on the floor. . . . He could do only one thing at a time” (Roy 215). She knows, “...if he loved her he couldn't leave...if he fought he couldn't win” (Roy 330). She also knows that she can neither protect her love, nor the man she loves. But Ammu has the ‘reckless rage of a suicide bomber’, the ‘Unmixable Mix’ of tenderness and defiance (Roy 321). So she takes the road to ruin against her better judgement.

There are a number of references to Velutha's body in the text, both in its beauty and its vulnerability. When seen from Ammu's gaze, it is an object of female desire in its masculine beauty and its natural suppleness and grace. Ammu craves for it and is at once tinged with envy to see her daughter's physical ease with him:

In the dappled sunlight filtering through the dark green trees, Ammu watched Velutha lift her daughter effortlessly as though she was an inflatable child, made of air....

She saw the ridges of muscle on Velutha's stomach grow taut and rise under his skin like the divisions on a slab of chocolate. She wondered at how the body had changed so

quietly from a flat-muscled boy's body into a man's body.
Contoured and hard. A swimmer's body. A swimmer-
carpenter's body. Polished with a high-wax body polish.
(Roy 175)

Often this body is equated with nature which is the source of its beauty:

As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone
steps, she saw that the world they stood in was his. That he
belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud.
The trees. The fish. The stars. He moved so easily through
it. As she watched him she understood the quality of his
beauty. How his labour has shaped him. ... Had left its stamp
on him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace. (Roy
333-34)

But when she sees him in her dream, Ammu always sees him as a one-armed
man, his physical handicap thus equated with his social handicap in her subconscious.

From the perspective of others, Velutha's body is always exposed as a site for
abuse and attack. It is unprotected and receiver of the fury and hatred of others. On
the discovery of his 'crime' Mammachi threatens him with emasculation: "If I find
you on my property tomorrow I'll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are"
(Roy 284). When Velutha looks at his own body, there is almost a death-wish associated
with it, a desire to bring an end to its existence:

His mind, suddenly impossibly old, floated out of his body
and hovered high above him in the air, from where it jabbered
useless warnings.

It looked down and watched a young man's body walk
through the darkness and the driving rain. More than
anything else that body wanted to sleep. Sleep and wake up
in another world. (Roy 285)

The way his body is mutilated by methodical police savagery, with 'sober, steady
brutality', also shows how a man's body is used by society to inflict the punishment for
breaking its laws, to set an example for possible future offenders:

...the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The
muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch
of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man's breath
when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib.
(Roy 308)

And the final blow is dealt on his male organ – a brutal violation of his masculinity:

One of them flicked at his penis with a stick. ‘Come on, show us your special secret. Show us how big it gets when you blow it up.’ Then he lifted his boot (with millipedes curled into its sole) and brought it down with a soft thud. (Roy 311)

An untouchable in his inability to protect himself or fight for his love is thus somehow associated with the lack of masculinity, almost feminine in his marginalization.

Velutha is thus a man caught in a power game. On one side there is Ammu with her ‘reckless rage of a suicide bomber’, on the other is society with all its might. What, however, redeems Velutha from being a mere pawn foredoomed to destruction is his capacity for love. His tragic fortitude imparts dignity to a losing battle against powers higher than himself as well as his beloved.

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Writing from the Margin: The Corporeal Narrative in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

Tuhin Mukhopadhyay

Palanimutthu Sivakami is one of the pioneers in Dalit writing, especially in the arena of Dalit feminist writing along with Bama Faustina, Baby Kamble, Urmila Panwar, Meena Kandasamy and others, and she is a celebrated Tamil writer and the first Dalit woman I.A.S officer in Tamil Nadu. Publication of her first novel *Pazhiyana Kazhithalum* catapulted her into the glare of publicity and attracted a much wider attention, when it finds its English translation made by Sivakami herself with the title *The Grip of Change* in 2006. Unlike an ordinary wretched Dalit woman, Sivakami had a very successful career – both political and educational. Despite that, she had closely felt the subtle caste-based atrocities in the form of several discriminations, which are concomitant to her Dalit identity. Bama's *Karukku* also ponders on the experience of a Dalit woman, and like Sivakami, she did not merely create a space for her caste, but also for the women, who were the victim of a two-fold hierarchy. Although born in a pariah community, it was through her hard work and zealous interest that she was able to carve a niche for herself in her own community. Her writing strongly implies the need for higher education and economic independence, as these could be the redeeming factors through which a Dalit woman's life could lead towards a better prospect. She emphasizes not only upon the deceptively simple inter-caste binary hierarchy, but also on a more complex problem of intra-caste hierarchy, and the sinuous oppression lying underneath. Sivakami's artistic and critical vision also incorporates, not merely the common cause of the Dalits, who are outside the hegemonic grand narrative of the caste Hindus, but it subsumes the much neglected woman question – a crisis that is beyond the apparent caste issue. Sivakami superimposes an 'Author's Note' in order to appear self-critical of her own fictional work, and thereby attempts to rip the fabricated reality of the collective Dalit problem, as constituted solely on the basis of caste-based discrimination, which subtly excludes the woman question lying underneath. The pseudo-autobiographical technique, a common trope in Dalit writing, metaphorically represents the *petit recit* as a counter narrative to the hegemonic construct of the grand narratives, not only by the caste-Hindus, but also by the patriarchs of all communities across time and place. Moreover, the English translation, as Sivakami mentions in the Preface, is to attain a wider readership (viii). The paper therefore locates Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* within the interstices of a complex social structure instead of harping on its external facade.

“Ayyo . . . Ayyo . . . They have butchered me. . . . Ayyo . . .” the figure cried like a wounded animal and finally fell down. . . . Dried blood marked the flesh of her back. . . .

She showed her swollen arms. . . . The skin of her thighs and knees was scored and shredded as though she had been dragged over a rough surface. (Sivakami 3-4)

The Grip of Change is a story of Thangam, an innocent childless widow, who lost her husband at an early age, and she is deprived of her deserved financial assistance from her in-laws and is forced to seek fortune in the land of an upper-caste landlord Paranjyoti Udyar, who rapes her repeatedly by taking advantage of her survival compulsion and ‘conformist body.’ But, when this ‘liaison’ is unveiled to one of the landlord’s brothers-in-laws, the matter turned worst for her ironically. They beat her mercilessly for no guilt of her own, and unable to bear such torture and exploitation, she approached Kathamuthu, a local Dalit leader and an elected representative of the community for their causes. Unbeknownst to her, this enables her to another incarceration – the jaws of patriarchy. This is clearly evident, when Kathamuthu suggests, “That’s why I said you should have chosen one of our men” (Sivakami 10). It seems as if women are the playthings to the men, and in a male chauvinistic society, such things really occur. Thangam had no choice of her own. She did not even choose the landlord, but the landlord merely used her to satisfy his carnal hunger. And when she did not conform to this, her body is abused. When she sought justice to the man of her own caste, she is simply harassed, and the blame is instead heaped upon her. It appears that every woman is a born dalit, in terms of the oppression meted out to her, and that is ironically irrespective of her caste identity. Oppression in case of a woman seems to be a-temporal and a-conditional. If ever any caste she has, which she does not, it is that of her being a woman itself, and her very womanhood is something that is socially and ideologically constructed, and it is never a matter of biology, although it is presented as such – this is the root of all of her oppression. Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* traces out this mechanism of exploitation, “one is not born a woman. One becomes one” (330)

Thangam’s ‘body’ is very significant here in this context. On one hand, she is physically abused and is subjected to male sexual lust across caste and class, and on the other, her body becomes a graphic representation of the narrative of caste-based and gender-based violence and oppression. The body becomes a text in itself, that underscores the dark history of rape, torture, exploitation, and female oppression – not simply as an outcome of an inter caste violence, but of a complex yet subtle intra-caste oppression. It is similar to the chokeberry tree on Sethe’s back in *Beloved*, that recounts the alternative dark history of the dehumanizing slavery, rape, oppression,

and exploitation, which undercuts the hegemonic white American history of the reconstruction ear. This mode of subversion is also present here – Thangam’s body becomes a semiotic word of protest and subversion. Thangam is abused physically, verbally and sexually, not only by the upper caste landlords, but also by the patriarchs of her own community. Her social recognition was brought to a naught after her husband’s death – she then became a ‘surplus’ for her brothers-in-law, who forced her to near prostitution by snatching her due right to her husband’s land. They claimed to return her due right with the condition that her body must satiate their lust. Thangam recounts her experience in the following words,

Paranjothi from the upper caste street is very rich. His hands go right up to the next village, Arumadal. After my husband died I began working in Paranjothi’s farm. My husband’s brother refused to hand over his share of the family land as I didn’t have any children. How could I fight them? I could not go to court. Who can spend that much money? . . . I am a single woman now. (Sivakami 6)

Thangam is an outcaste everywhere, and she is abandoned in the cold outer darkness when she does not yield to their bestial desire. She is usurped all of her due rights, and this act of utter injustice is ‘justified’ – she cannot have a share of her husband’s property because she has had an ‘infertile ‘body.’ A woman’s identity is thereby determined by her womb and her reproductive ability, without which she is considered to be a barren wasteland. It is treated like an abhorrent junk needed to be thrown out at some unspecified corner. She is seen in a patriarchal society (irrespective of caste), as no less than a walking vagina with a womb on it. Beauvoir puts it in a more sophisticated terms, “She is a womb, an ovary . . . this word is enough to define her” (41). Thangam tells Kathamuthu “My husband’s brother tried to force me, but I never gave in. They wouldn’t give me my husband’s land, but wanted me to be a whore for them! I wouldn’t give in . . .” (Sivakami 7). Despite that, Thangam could not literally save her ‘body.’ Devoid of money and the means for physical sustenance, the destitute Thangam steps outside the house for earning her livelihood, and consequently she takes up the job of a laborer in the field of an upper class landlord, Paranjothi Udayar. She took her job to be a redeeming factor – a way out of her sufferings – but ironically fate had something else designed for her. She is raped by Udayar, the same person, whom she thought to be her liberating agent. She explains this to Kathamuthu in oblique terms “Paranjothi Udayar has had me . . . true” (Sivakami 7), and with a tormenting conscience and with a sense of self-deprecating shame, she says, “I didn’t want it. But Udayar took no notice of me. He raped me when I was working in his sugarcane. I remained silent; after all, he is my paymaster. He measures my rice . . .” (Sivakami 7). Nevertheless, her ‘silence’ did not remain empty, but it was

pregnant with the word of protest, quite similar to that of Benare in Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Although she had to remain 'silent' before such heinous oppression, she did not comply with it but instead became subversive through her recusant attitude and her narrative reconstruction – both in the form of narrating her tortured experience to Kathamuthu (where it finds a violent outburst) and also in the form of Sivakami's narrative reconstruction of it. Her body is not only abused, but also disgraced, and that too by her 'own' relatives. She says, "My husband's relatives spread the story that I had become Paranjothi's concubine" (Sivakami 6). When the disgrace meted out to her body (by Udayar) is revealed, she became subjected to further mutilations – both physical and psychological. Her body became a witness to such uncouth brutalities and atrocities mitigated upon it, which resembled the unspeakable things unspoken. They cannot be truly articulated in conventional dictum, and yet they must find resonance in some alternative means. The irony is that they cannot be simply passed on, and yet they need to be passed on and on. Thangam's voice reverberates,

Paranjothi's wife's brothers and her brother-in-law, four men, entered my house last night. They pulled me by my hair and dragged me out to the street. They hit me, and flogged me with a stick stout as a hand. They nearly killed me. No one in the village, none of my relatives, came to help me. I begged for mercy, but they wouldn't stop. They abused me and threatened to kill me if I stayed in that village any longer. They called me a whore. (Sivakami 7)

The irony evident in the above passage is that when an upper caste touches, it is always regarded as a boon to the 'untouchables,' but on the other way round, it is a matter of 'sin.' It is clear from Udayar's boasting, "Ungrateful whore! Even if she was hurt, hurt by the hand adorned with gold! A parachi could have never dreamt of being touched by a man like me! My touch was a boon granted for penance performed in her earlier births! And then the dirty bitch betrays me! How can I face the world with my name thus 'polluted'" (Sivakami 31). These words reveal the hypocrisy of the Hindu caste system, in which an upper caste can disparage a lower caste by considering her 'untouchable,' but when he gratifies his carnal hunger through the same Dalit bodies the 'sin' melts into the thin air. Notwithstanding that, it is not the end of Thangam's sufferings. Tragically, her body is still to submit itself vulnerably to the hands of the rich patriarch of her own community. Helpless Thangam takes refuge in the Arthur village, hoping for redemption and justice, but it proves to be no less fatal for her spirit. The little remaining that she had with her is grabbed, and her body is violated again – this time by Kathamuthu, the rich and influential Dalit Panchayat 'leader.' He earlier gave her shelter when after being raped by Udayar, Thangam approached him for

redemption; but the same person turns out to be a brutal beast. In one afternoon while she was sleeping in the kitchen, Kathamuthu, goaded by his bestial instinct, rapes her, and she became so tormented that she could not even see his face. This is evident in Gowri's word – when Kathamuthu rapes her, she vehemently shouts, “Dogs! Dogs in the house! Shameless as dogs” (Sivakami 93). At the cost of giving her shelter and food, her vulnerability is sex-ploited, and she is forced to yield to his desire. This continued for days and weeks, until she became almost labeled to be his third wife. The Dalit man thus perhaps sadistically releases himself from his own oppressive situation meted to him by the upper caste Hindu men and women and materializes his repressed desire for supremacy by sexually and economically subjugating the women of their own community. Thangam epitomizes this dilemma of all the subjugated women, or women as perennially subjugated irrespective of class, caste, race, nation and ethnicity; and her battered ‘body’ which frames the opening scene becomes a living document in which is scripted the gender-based and caste-based atrocities. However, despite being a womb and a site of oppression, Thangam's body assumes a subversive status and puts up a resistance through the process of its narrative manifestation. Following Cixous's comment, one can say that the female body (here is the case of Thangam) becomes a semiotic trope of subversion against the masculine repressive measures and opens up “the very possibility of change” (Cixous 879). Cixous makes a call to the women in her brilliant essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ “She must write her Self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent . . . Write your Self. Your body must be heard. Only then the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. Our naphtha will spread, throughout the world, without dollars – black or gold – non-assessed values that will change the rules of the old game” (880). Thangam's corporeal rendering of her story finds a literal translation through Gowri's inscription of her own [hi] story, which is in collusion to that of the author Sivakami herself, and in so doing, the oppressed figures of such millions Thangams become transformed into insurgent figures of Gowri (s). Her flesh speaks out in terms of the signifiers, and as the truth unveils itself, she throws her trembling body forward in order to dislodge the ‘logic’ of the phallus (Cixous 881). Thangam means gold, and on the golden parchment of her palpable self is projected in the black ink the history of the gold-rush as well as that of lust. Meena Kandasamy, a contemporary Dalit writer, in her essay “And One Shall live in two” beautifully puts this, “The rare beauty and honesty of the narrative arise from its body-centricity” (Sivakami 194). The oppressed and subjugated body draws its strength from within itself in order to gain ascendancy in Kathamuthu's house and gradually establishes her dominance over his wives. In fact, as the course of the narrative follows and the incidents unfold themselves, it becomes clear how a single woman's life is capable of triggering a caste riot that can subvert and topple the caste oligarchy. This corporeal narrative and narrative corporeality assumes the trope of defiance against male's hegemonic power and dominance. In the introductory part

of *The History of Sexuality, Vol-I*, Foucault points out a similar dialectical relation of power / resistance by emphasizing upon the emergence of a counter measure – a recusant attitude – which arises itself from the margin in relation to the centre of power. He wonderfully says, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power . . . one is always “inside” power, there is no escaping it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned . . .” (95). Although it is clear from this that Foucault’s theorization is much abstract, and he not only points out the dialectic of power and resistance but also extends his discussion to incorporate an omnipresent nature of power, which may seem to somehow relegate the gravity of resistance, it can be said beyond doubt in the context of this story that Thangam’s body-text materializes the resistance in the form of the riot and causes enough subversion, so as to usher a positive change, as recorded in the text and reflected in the title. Through her novel, Sivakami thus critiques not only the casteist oppression but also the unmitigated violence and torture attributed upon the feminized body. Kandaswamy, therefore, appreciates Sivakami for this honest self-criticism in the same essay by saying,

The first Tamil novel by a Dalit woman, it evoked a great deal of discussion because it went beyond condemning caste fanatics by using fiction to describe how we were shackled, and tangled among ourselves. Instead of being the journey of her individual voice and consciousness, it was a unanimous expression of the youth of this oppressed community- eager and waiting for change. (Kandasamy 193)

Truly conforming to the title the novel, *The Grip of Change* not only voices the plight of an exploited Dalit woman but also records the waves of change in Dalit consciousness and thus hints at a panacea to eradicate the ailment of the society. Through the character of Gowri, the ideal of education as a panacea for this problem is suggested. Dr B. R Ambedkar strongly proclaimed the exigency of education for the Dalit community, and as recorded in his biography by Dhananjay Keer, Dr Ambedkar says,

“My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle, not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality.” (351)

Education has this immense impact upon the human society, and especially upon

the Dalits, that they can reap its material benefit by its agency. Otherwise, their existence will meet a peril. The novel postulates a crude stereotype of patriarchy along with a hopeful vision of liberation presented by Gowri, Kathamuthu's daughter, who is an embodiment of the future Dalit women, who will be able to embrace the principles of higher education and enlightenment in order to liberate themselves from the shackles of caste-discrimination and gender oppression. The entire story is narrated through the eyes of this young girl, who comments upon its significance. Marriage is one such patriarchal institution through which power and oppression is shrewdly exercised. Hence, to avoid marriage, Gowri works hard for her examination and after getting success chooses to study further in the city college. Her strict refusal to the oppressive institution of marriage is evident in her words, "The sufferings that my mother underwent in her marriage! I don't want to be tortured like her by some man" (Sivakami 124). When she crosses the threshold of her home by ignoring her father's prohibition, she feels to have freed herself from the tyrannical chains, and this feeling is beautifully conveyed in the text, "During flood, waters from overflowing wells mingle with the waters of huge water bodies, transgressing their boundaries." (Sivakami 95). Gowri feels that she has crossed the man-made boundaries engineered by her father and by the patriarchal and casteist society at large, and she desires to merge with the ocean of the people. Gowri is in fact the mouthpiece of Sivakami, who gives voice to such countless Dalit women, who are 'silently' bearing such inhuman oppression and atrocities. Gowri liberates not only herself but also her mother Kangawali and her step-mother Nagamani, and she does so by means of provoking them against the tormenting patriarchy of her father and criticizing his polygamous marital status, in which the condition of the women / wives are no less than the slaves – the sexual slaves. She undertakes an effort to educate her mother and her step-mother Nagamani, so that they can liberate themselves from Kathamuthu's subjugation. Through the autobiographical nature of the story – that of Gowri – Sivakami questions and rejects the very structure of patriarchy that curtails female empowerment. Convinced of her ideological inclination, she rejects marriage because for her marriage is that patriarchal institution that legitimizes and perpetuates gender oppression. The tide of change is also noticeable when Kathamuthu, the patriarch of the family, who did not allow his women to think or question his decisions and orders, becomes sensitive to the comments, critical looks, and queries of his daughter, and discarding all of his old habits and practices, he too complies with her desire for the higher studies. Even when she asserts her freedom by deciding not to marry and thereby symbolically proclaiming her liberation from the enchained slavery of casteism, patriarchy and gender subjugation, he gives in. Hence, even at thirty-two, Gowri is able to maintain her single unmarried status. Whether Sivakami professes the complete elimination of marriage from the society, or not, is a debatable issue and a point that further research on this can take up. However, the novel concludes with Gowri's article wherein she foregrounds the

need for “a strong movement that would join hands with backward, oppressed and poor caste.” Her brother, Sekharan advises her to work in co-ordination with Chandran, who will perhaps help in translating “a vision into reality.” He therefore says, “It is not enough to write. He [Chandran] knows how to put it into action” (Sivakami 193).

Therefore, in conclusion, I argue that Sivakami not merely exhibits the issues of inter-caste conflicts, as it is the convention of the prevalent Dalit or subaltern studies, but rather, she brings to light the intra-caste carcinogenic ills (with all its contrasts and contradiction) that are recurring in every society for times immemorial, and especially because it remained neglected even in the academic arena. However, Sivakami never appears to be a pessimist. She offers glimpses of hope – the means to surpass or cure these maladies through educational enlightenment and economic empowerment for the beleaguered daughters of India, who will pioneer to carry the flag of change. However, minus are not the mutual respect, feelings of oneness and the solidarity to fight against their disparaging condition in the society with one body, one mind, and one force, but they are all embodied through such characters as Chandran and Sekharan. Finally, with the rare convention of writing a sequel, here entitled as the “Author’s Note,” Sivakami takes up the excruciating task of being self-critical of her own work by entangling herself parallel to the main narrative (where Sivakami assumes the persona of Gowri, and Kathamutthu becomes a fictional counterpart of her father) and looks at it from a matured vision. I conclude here with Kandasamy’s pertinently remarks that it require a “re-rendering and [a] re-interpretation,” and thus it can complete “yet another re-visitation.”

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Exploitation: A Route to Recognition for Women Musicians

Niladri Roy

‘Music Industry’ – a booming cultural hub of 21st century India is speedily spreading its branchlet with an unbelievably increasing tempo. Precisely the whole music industry is largely dependent on variety of musical genres which are quite popular to all section of society. Besides mass popularity, day by day it is also getting importance for a large employment generation. Thus, huge amount of income generation is now not a mere dream to achieve. A large section of entertainment economy is pretty dependent on music industry. To mention here, several varieties of genre present in Indian music, be it classical form, semi-classical form, light music form or varied folk form has created a large space for the performers, academia personnel, government approved artists and music researchers, and with this, all these ‘music dependent’ are exposed to the economy stated. It is absolutely necessary to hit one point before, that all these mentioned genres have a long old tradition and all the torch bearers are somehow not present to hold the flag anymore. This in turn has deprived us from witnessing the traditional performances of those nearly extinct genres. Then what we receive actually? Only the reminiscences of the traditional forms are performed in a new package. This is because already the form is modified. This in turn evokes the nostalgic velocity of rumination in society for the form which is not original but modified. However, everybody pretends to be very cultural and thus that modified form gets a trending nature. The income opportunities who are engaged in music profession, seems lucrative and in turn gets attracted to them. The male as always aggressive by nature, use to get their desired place by any means and very shrewdly try to corner woman, their counterparts as a boasted autocrat who controls the society. This is applicable in music sector also. This article here tries to focus on music and its female worshippers in a large periphery – from performers to artists and from music academicians to music researchers. In large number of cases, all the mentioned categories are highly skilled, talented and outstanding musicians and academicians that they can very easily supersede the male, but in spite of the hard truth in turn as a payback woman musicians and music dependents always face the vices of exploitation and darkness of the society to get establishment in music sector. Male dominated society always tries to manipulate the woman artist and pushes them to sit in the unwanted couches for the recognition they desire to achieve from the industry. This article starts from here.

Music learning - the first barrier:

Indian music learning is an orthodox process where the teacher is considered as supreme and is given a status of a Guru. However, the concept of Guru is vast as it comes from the tradition of Vedic principle. In this modern age when we have opportunity to send emails from remote hilly areas, who cares to be a Guru following rigid Vedic philosophy? Therefore, learning process of music also becomes a restructured programme. A Guru or teacher plans and executes what the learning process would be, understanding the actual situation. This restructuring process is one of the loops where the female learners get their first blow of exploitation. Parsons opines that 'Those who are fully engaged in the production of wealth do not control what they produce, and do not enjoy the full benefits of their labour: this, still, is what exploitation means' (339).

Usually a girl child in most of the areas is honestly sent for training or Talim to a teacher only for basic training and not for the methodized training to be a performer in future. In greater part of India, it is still believed, that basic knowledge in music will help a girl to get married in a decent family with high income. Thus from the beginning of teaching-learning process a social barrier and then a mental blockade paralyze the relationship of teacher and student. For a teacher, girl students become an easiest way to make quick money. They come and get some quick lessons so that they could add some score in their C.V for marriage proposals. Therefore she has to learn some of the popular scores of music for the mere presentation before the members of the groom. Teacher does not get bothered to emphasize the foundation building of the musicality of a girl learner. Parents promise to pay a hefty amount for the desired grooming of their girl to the teacher and teacher in turn expedites the process of music learning by sketching the outline of presentation what to be done by the girl before members of the groom for selection. Teachers most of the times skip the flaws of presentation of the girl in music and a false appreciation comes to satisfy the parents. After that, as part of investment the financial interest of the teacher compels the parents to buy a particular brand of musical instruments from the school, although, this point applies to maximum music learners irrespective of gender. Here a question arises, what if the girl is talented and skilled enough to present a good music? The answer reflects the hypocrisy of the society. In maximum cases the male disciple is projected as the future face of the school, while the girl learner is treated as if she is only to exhibit her skills to get a place in society norms and cannot be a music performer. It is the first stroke that a girl gets at the foundation of her music learning. This ruthless naked truth, of course, is not applicable about those good teachers who spend their whole life to build up their girl students without nurturing in them gender bias and who are instrumental in producing aesthetically enriched woman musicians. That is why still now the 'Gurukul' concept has not become extinct and is followed by many.

Entering into the music performance

Many obstacles came in the path of women musicians over the ages; still the excellent musicianship is always appreciated by the society. From the very beginning things were never easy for the women musicians, though the fact has always remained concealed deep beneath and never exposed to day light or been documented anywhere. Sometimes it reveals partly but in most of the cases it is suppressed deep in ground. Society has preached that the women musicians are only meant to perform, so neither their problems nor their pains should come to the forefront. But the most irony is that India worships Goddess Saraswati as a supreme of music. Such is the height of hypocrisy.

Let us now discuss some troublesome issues related to music performance that every single woman musician deals with. We assume that today women musicians have already exhibited their skills and professionalism in all musical genres. The very first problem they face is about the scope to get performance spaces. Most of the programs organizers and arrangers are male. They first exploit them with monetary agreements. There is a tendency to reduce their payment and fulfill it with a complimentary simple food packet against one performance. Proper prime slots are not offered to the young woman performers. Instead of that they only offer a mere opening song or a stop gap in between performances. This is the most common problem that has to be tackled by the women musicians on the way to their establishment. In addition to this, the concerts controlled by the big corporate houses have separate norms for women performers to get chances. Corporate houses always look for high profit for which higher promotion is needed and for the much needed promotion of their shows they introduce the famous, known faces as are the kingpins of performances. They never give platform to a woman performer who is struggling to come up even though she has talent.

The music sphere is getting narrower for the women artists who are targeting the reality shows. They are attracted to these shows to get a strong foothold in their music career. Reality shows in popular channels of television is a very strong medium to reach the audience all over the country and the impact on the audience is also very deep because of their audio-visual medium. But the reality of the 'Reality Shows' is that these have a very glowing and glittering outer cover which attracts the common mass, but underneath full of vices with filthy, pungent smells which are never exposed. One common practice here always exercised about selection of participants and among them selection of female candidates are always dubious. One of the famous music reality shows of Bengal has a reputation to curb the creativity of the participant as they try to focus on the particular channel TRP and for that the program coordinator takes resort to many unethical means only to glamourize the program.

The talent of a woman musician and her ability to perform thus gets limited within the boundaries of exploitation. In the reality shows the main criteria for selecting a proper candidate includes a good look with groomed urban charisma. The contestant must be physically attractive and the musical ability comes last in the desired list. The program coordinators tend to select a contestant who is well presentable before camera, well groomed and have exciting physical attributes. Music performance does not matter so much for the limelight and mass popularity. Thus the exploitation begins and a lower graded performer gets chance to present her in front of camera, depriving a genuine and good lady contestant in that music reality show.

It is instructed to the selected contestant to imitate a female contestant of the previous season who somehow became popular and produced a high TRP for that concerned channel. This type of arbitrary and random nonmusical instruction hinders the creativity of a true musician. There is a trend to impose the style of singing, costumes, song selection, body gestures (which may not be palatable for many of us) and even voice! Such is the regimentation to project a woman as a commodity. There is no room for musical imagination and musical talent. Every episode is very much scripted and they have an inclination to sell the struggle of the budding female contestant in a widespread audio-visual medium. This is not only happening in modern times, but since the days of Bharat Muni's *Natyasastra* where the position of women in the cultural field has been faithfully depicted. Priyanka Sharma in her discussion on the place of women in *Natyasastra* states 'Natyasastra describes about women according to feminine qualities. And in this description sexual body emerges as essential for being an actress. The image of woman which is presented before the audience- who is very erotic for man, but whose her own sexuality is marginalized, who is sweet and advised to bear man's every action even violence and her only anxiety is to make man happy. Their will works according to men. Her importance is only for her attractive body. This is the heroine of *Natyasastra*. Heroine means the ideal woman, who can be presented before the audience. And this aesthetics and culture of Brahminical patriarchy is transmitted to another social group or generation highlighting the qualities of an ideal woman' (7).

As we have already proceeded to some extent on the malpractice of projecting a woman as a commodity in the society, we can cite a classic example of a popular Bengali film 'Golpo holeo sotti' here (Golpo holeo sotti 02:2.17-4.54). The sequence in that film is related to a cartoonist, who prepares a print commercial of 'men's tie'. The creative head of the commercial advertisement imposes a cartoonist to draw in a manner where the tie is wrapped in a female body and the female body should be exposed vulgarly. This is the situation where a woman to a large extent is purposely used to relieve orgasm of male eyes. Male tries the method of body shaming of female to get the absolute control over the market. S.S.Roy in his "Portrayal of women in

Indian Media-In the era of neo-liberal economy” states that ‘the companies busy with competition are using the faces and bodies of beautiful women to popularise their products. These producers always producing lots of products everyday and there is competition everywhere to become the best seller. For this they are using women in a cheap manner whether necessary or not. For example, they are using women in the advertisements of cigarette, male underwear, man’s shaving cream etc. They are portraying women wrongly for their own purpose’ (n.p.).

Victoria Graham projects the same thought in her blog also - ‘It has never been a secret that in advertising film and music, sex sells! However the music industry is one that exploits this fact more than any, through its exploitation of women. The music industry is the most patriarchal male run industry in the world, producers, record label owners and managers are for the vast majority all male. The music industry is an industry that relies on female nudity and exploitation to sell records. This is made evident by female pop-star’s success such as: Rihanna, Miley Cyrus, Katy Perry and many more, as throughout their career they have all continued and progressively so to use sexualized imagery and film to advertise and perform their music. How often do you watch a music video where one of these performers are not dancing in a provocative way or barely dressed? Hardly ever. And what makes this factor so troubling is that the likelihood is, these women are given very little option to their level of nudity or proactive manner they are performing in. They are working in an industry dominated by men who value female nudity, and the capacity music videos and performances that contain provocative aspects have to make a large amount of money. (n.p.)’

The next area of problem for lady musicians is the political nexus. The programs whether they are in an auditorium or an open air program, they are many times controlled by powerful political parties. If any lady musician tries to be politically neutral and does not want to come under any particular political flag, she might not be able to get hold of any kind of musical performance. By any means, a political leader for his or her vested interest wants to get absolute control over the female musicians under the banner of the political party. This can be specifically cited as a typical example of the state of West Bengal. The other parts of India are no exception to this. This forced inclination towards a political party thus hinders the talent opening by that lady musician. This is one of the major issues to deal for getting establishment in music by a lady musician.

There are problems and huge exploitation faced by the lady musicians in every nooks and corners of the society. Now, without any hesitation let’s talk about the white elephant in the room. Women musicians are very vulnerable to sexual exploitations in every moment of their musical career. They become the worst victim of sexual exploitation if they are struggling to get a grab in the film-music industry. Every time the struggling women who want to get established as a playback singer in the music

industry, get trapped in the sex circle where male usually thinks those strugglers are so compelled that they will be easily tamed like an animal. But, sheer talent sometimes shines through to arrest attention despite exploitation. The lady musicians with their musical ability and outstanding performance get a hold in heart of the audiences. This can be seen everywhere both in India and western music industries in all type of small programs, big concerts, playback singing and where not. Bonitch in her blog has revealed this nude fact 'Nonetheless, there are also many young singers that try to make their way into the music industry by selling their bodies. One could say that if this is the case, sex sells over talent. In these cases, are women being exploited by the music industry? Probably yes. However, this type of video would not have the same success if the audience did not buy it. The music industry like many other industries, seeks for greater profits and in order to get them, they use sex as a way of capturing the attention of the audience. These types of music videos where women appear constantly half naked have been really popular in the last decade and are now more and more common within the music culture'(n.p.).

The same kind of situation nowadays creeps into academic arenas also. The women aspirants in music academics are the newest victim of exploitations. The normal academics of the undergraduate and postgraduate in music are something framed under a syllabus. However, from the time when women academician wants to pursue the doctoral degrees and allied higher degrees in music, they in some of the cases get trapped in unwanted situations. Undue advantages are taken to get passed in the eligibility tests or getting a place in the merit-list where merit sometimes gets cornered and black interest supersedes the real merit of the lady music academician. This dark world of exploitation covers everything from bribing money and material bribe to sexual exploitation. A research in music gets blocked at the foundation and aspiring candidates who are dreaming of getting doctoral degree are finished before starting. The darker aspect is that if by any chance, the woman candidate gets a chance to overcome all these obstacles and excel in the academic sector, the next threat is employment. Again the vicious cycle appears before a girl. The pink dreams again faded into grey-blue dreams. The employment most of the times are controlled by the male world and regarding employment, they are 'Shylock' before any woman to get the cent percent interest.

At the end of this article when 'Shylock' is cited, the role of 'Portia' as savior is not intentionally mentioned. In many places women who get trapped in these unwanted couches during their period of struggle become heartless and revengeful. Their attitude to their fellow beings of their same gender changes and also when their juniors come and get more attraction than they get, they feel enraged. Their modes of thinking changes from saint to devil and they feel like this - 'Did I deserve exploitation when I have enough potentiality to achieve it easily. So when I went through this path of hell

they should follow the same *route to get recognition*'. Thus the path of vice in the world of music is perpetuated. Reform becomes a far cry.

Even in 2018, when 'Make in India' vision or 'Kanyashree' project is all around, the desire of a girl who wants to be a musician is curbed highly. When a girl returns home at midnight from her music recordings, the neighbourhood, even the members of her family sometimes react in a weird way as if the girl is getting back home from a filthy place. The mentality in this smacks of medieval feudalism. The golden girl Swapna Barman after giving her excellent performance in sports, held us amazed by her fabulous voice in folk music. The press asked her coach whether she will sing further as a professional or not; her coach replied that singing can wait but her prime focal point is the 'Sports' at this moment. Her coach may be right to some extent but still a question remains unanswered. The fantastic singer was discouraged at the very prime of her life and folk music also could provide her with the motivation to win. The power of and penchant for singing too cannot wait for lifetime to bloom. Here in this paper I have tried to cover the problems that a female singer faces to achieve the recognition in the field of music. It is said that women represent 'Shakti'. They overcome all the hindrances on their route. I sincerely hope that women would become a lineage carrier of musical tradition in the long run and in times to come. This would be a win for music too.

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Melodies of ‘Unchaste’ Souls: A Chronicle of Outcaste Performers of North India

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Women, since genesis are being treated as an object of pleasure and entertainment, a moveable property of Men with no rights. However, through ages this bitter truth is being cleverly curtailed with a sugarcoated camouflage by portraying women in different texts and scriptures as a paradigm of grace and beauty. Men have over the time repeatedly constructed and reconstructed the definition of femininity and the notion make women believing that they are the most precious, ornamental and fragile object with passivity and tenderness. Thus the traits place them on the ivory tower of divinity and surrealistic world. Nevertheless, the dark side always reveals the agony, the betrayal and exploitation since the ancient mythological days. The celestial nymphs like Menakā, Rambhā, Urvaśī of Heaven were supposed to be the first professional singers and dancers who were also being chosen as a medium by the Lord of Heaven King Indra to ruin the meditation of sages by luring and seducing. Hence losing their virtues were only supposed to be the act of duty and submission towards their Lord. Henceforth, with this, the idea of sacred prostitution might have been started from those mythological days and Apsarās and Kinnarīs were the first high class prostitutes in the form of celestial demi-gods. So, in this way the stories of Apsarās and Kinnarīs from mythological texts naturally arises a significant question depicting the genesis of this custom. It is beyond doubt that prostitution as a profession is very ancient; perhaps when the human civilization started considering woman as a commodity of entertainment, prostitution emerged. In this respect it is to be said that there is always a subtle line between prostitutes and courtesans, though sexual favors and companionship were the common traits in both professions. Still the courtesans namely Nagaravadhūs, Tawaifs, Bājīs, Gānewālis whatever they were called through the ages are considered as the true artisans by heart.

While tracing out the history of professional singers and dancers, historian like V.R. Ramachandra Dikshtar opines that Indus Valley civilization might have witnessed temple prostitution at its initial stage. The bronze figurine of the dancing girl that unearthed during the archaeological excavation of Mohenjo-Daro, symbolizes a temple girl carrying out her duties within the enclosure of a temple of Mother Goddess that perhaps represents the sacred prostitution, though there is no such evidence to support this view (121).

Vedic culture, though rich with its moral values still have enough evidences to prove the fact that ‘Vārāṅganāvriti’ or prostitution as a profession existed since the early Vedic period. The terms like Sādhārānī or Sāmānya were used as the synonyms of prostitutes. In Rigveda it is being stated that women were chosen for singing praising songs in front of deities during the squeezing out of the ‘Soma Rasa’. There is also reference of dancing girls. As for instance, Ushā or dawn resembled a dancing girl wearing embroidered dress baring her bosom (*Rigveda* I.92.4; X. 95.9). Rigveda also mentions that the Rishis were given gift of cattle and slave girls by the Kings as fees for sacrifices. Apart from *Rigveda*, in different schools of Vedas, references of prostitutes can easily be traced. *Atharvaveda* mentions ‘Pungchali’ and ‘Mahānagni’. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* refers ‘Atiskadvārī’ and ‘Apaskadvārī’ (Tai. Br. III.4.7; Atharvaveda XIV. I.36; XX. 136.5). In *Upanishad* it is mentioned that Kings were attended by five hundred pretty maids carried perfumed water. In later Vedic period, the era of *Purāṇas*, *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* there are several stories relating the prostitution culture of that period. There are references to ‘Veśyānārīs’ or harlots those were considered as a part of the armies of the Kings. They were also participated in the victory celebrations. In *Rāmāyana* it is stated that during furnishing a strong army for Rāma, King Daśaratha included beautiful women in the rear of the army (*Rāmāyana* II. 36.3). In *Mahābhārata* it is said that the armies of Duryodhana and Pāṇḍava during the Kurukshetra battle-field accompanied by professional singers, craftsmen, spies and courtesans (*Mahābhārata* V. 195.18 -19).

Kautilya in *Arthaśāstra* has used the terms like Dāsī, Rūpajīva, Ganikā as references of prostitutes (Shyamasastri: 55, 175). The prostitutes were proficient in singing, playing musical instruments like Vīṇā, Bāṇsūrī and drums, acting and also manufacturing scents and garlands. Here one fact is needed to be point out that in *Arthaśāstra*, Kautilya has mentioned that these Ganikās were specially trained the art of alluring and enchanting the mind of others. (Shyamasastri: 178). This reference indulges a possibility of using these harlots as spies, being employed by the state. There are several grades of Courtesans and prostitutes at the time of Kautilya. They were the important sources of revenue for the state. Even Kautilya in *Arthaśāstra* has dedicated one whole chapter on the rules and regulations for the prostitutes, led by the state for unquestionable control over them (Shyamasastri: 175 -178). In *Kāmāsūtra*, Vātsāyana refers different grades of prostitutes and they had their position in the society as per their proficiency in sixty-four kalās. Vātsāyana mentions varieties of terms like Rūpajīva, Ganikā, Veśyā, Vannadāsī etc and they served the society as per their skillfulness. Vātsāyana also mentions that Ganikās were the well versed in sixty-four kalās and they were the symbol of aristocracy and pride of the kings and the royal men. These Ganikās were the Courtesans, served themselves as the singers and dancers of the royal courts. These courtesans also played an important role in royal

politics as well. Sometimes they were employed by the government as spies to watch out the suspects.

Patañjali in Yogasūtra also in reference to low grade actors and actresses with whom the dancing girls were some ways associated, mentions that those girls were known as ‘Jayajīva’ and ‘Rūpajīva’ in the society. But they achieved not as much status as like the Ganikās. The Ganikās were the pivotal area of the power position in King’s court. Sanskrit playwrights of BCE also portrayed courtesans or Nagarvadhūs like Vasanasenā, Vāsavadattā, Āmrāpālī etc as the protagonists in their Sanskrit dramas. Even in Buddhist literature, especially in Jātakas there are several references of Rājadāsīs and Sevādāsīs, specially the Rājadāsīs were called ‘Natī’. With a gaining popularity of Buddhism and Jainism, such Natīs got superior position in the society; hence became a focal point of royal power. This increasing power and popularity of these Nagarānatīs or Nagarvadhūs made them indispensable in the contemporary literature, music, dance, epigraphy and sculpture. In Jain literature even in old Pali and Buddhist literature several references of Nagarvadhūs like Magadhavati, Sālavati, Vāsavadattā, Āmrāpālī, Vimalā are significantly noticeable. Apart from all these references from *Vedas*, *Purānas*, *Upanishad*, *Jātaka*, Sanskrit dramas, Buddhist and Jain literature, references from the musicological texts like *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, *Abhinayadarpana* of Nandikeśvara of the dancing girls performed in sacred occasions are quite noteworthy. Even more interesting fact is that these dancing girls portrayed in *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Abhinayadarpana* were ought to be slender, attractive, intelligent with all the qualities of allurements.

Hence, while tracing the history of courtesans since the remote past, from all the gathering sources, it is clear that courtesans were the cultivation of urbanized society of ancient India. They were considered as the symbol of culture and the life of luxury. Around 6th century BCE as the cities and townships began to flourish with the trade route in North India, prostitution as a profession emerged. Since the remote past in the patriarchal society though the position of the women have always been displayed as the commodity of man’s enjoyment, still the courtesans or the Nagarvadhūs had much power and position in the society, as prostitution was not considered as a sinful act. Chief courtesans usually got enough privilege from the king. They even maintained their own row of singers and dancers, being patronized by the royal courts. These upper class courtesans or Ganikās were of highly aesthetical sense and intellectual abilities; hence they were obliged to provide entertainment to the king and royal king’s men.

Indian history of prostitution also witnessed another type of prostitution namely temple prostitution or divine prostitution. This trend might have emerged much later than the profession of courtesans. In *Jātaka* or Kautilya’s *Arthaśāstra*, there is no reference of Devadāsī tradition. The existence of these Devadāsīs might have first

confirmed with the Jogimara caves inscription in early 3rd century BCE which is being translated by M. Boyer as ‘Sutanukā by name, devadāsī. The excellent among young man loved her, Devadinna by name, skilled in sculpture’. The term Devadāsī literally means ‘Slave of God’. They were literally married to God or Goddess. In Kavi Dhoyi’s ‘Pavanadūta’ kavya there is also references of devadāsīs which follows classification of this category. Sri Karunamoy Goswami in *Sangitkosh* has mentioned three categories of prostitute – Devadāsī, Rājadāsī and Svadāsī. Devadāsīs were the temple dancers introduced for only temple worship. Rājadāsīs were the high class courtesans who were meant for entertaining kings and nobles, while Svadāsīs were the nautch girls who were engaged for entertaining common mass and the pilgrims through their dancing skills. Sometimes they also got chances to exhibit their skills in front of deities during festivals (377). Gambhireswar temple in Varanasi, Jagannath temple in Puri, Odhisa, Somnath temple in Gujarat and many other temples in South India have witnessed long distressed journey of devadāsīs. At the beginning of 20th century CE from 1920 to 1947 various laws were passed to eradicate this profession, though it has never been permanently disappeared from the society till now. But the position of devadāsīs has fallen down and they converted into merely Patitā or public prostitutes.

Tawaifs in medieval North India:

Approximately around 12th century CE with the prominence of the court culture of North India, appointing and patronizing courtesans in royal courts became common practice by the Muslim rulers. They were quite dignified trained artisan of dancing and singing, served for the royal courts. In this cultural surrounding, a new class of sophisticated singer and dancer class called Tawaif were introduced. They were singer and dancer by profession. These Tawaifs were independent class of performers with supreme grace. They were similar in many ways to ‘Geishas’ of Japan. They were well educated and proficient in several regional languages to satisfy their elite clients from different regions. Under the patronage of Muslim rulers especially during the Mughal dynasty with the increasing inclination towards finest artistry, this custom became widely in practice. Tawaif culture became highly prospective art related career in around 16th century Lucknow and its adjacent areas, though we find Mughal emperors particularly Akbar and Aurangzeb took noteworthy steps to check the increasing demand of these women in the society as these Tawaifs were quite responsible for the growing moral laxity in the society. However, these Tawaifs were so refined and cultured that the younger generation from the royal families and the aristocrats were usually sent to their ‘Kothā’ to learn ‘Tameez’ and ‘Tehzeeb’. Young girls from their tender ages were given high class training in all forms of classical music and dance. These women were multitalented and devoted most of their time to hone themselves in singing, dancing, poetry and other artistic activities. Most of these women were from Muslim background; therefore they had natural tendency and proficiency in

Urdu language and literature. They also nurtured and possessed a graceful language of erotic art. These Tawaifs entertained their guests in *mehfils* through their charming performances, art of poetry and conversations.

A noted historian, Professor Veena Oldenburg in her book ‘The making of colonial Lucknow’ reveals that ‘relating Tawaif with prostitute is extremely a bad portrayal of this profession’. According to Abdul Halim Sharar in his book *Guzishta Lucknow* in 16th and 17th century Lucknow there were generally three categories of courtesans – The Kanchanis, group of harlots those were proficient in music and dancing (Oldenburg). In Abul Fazl’s *Āin-i-Ākbarī* there are references of Kanjaris who were called Kanchanis by the emperor (Ghosh: 56). The second group were Chunawalis and the third the Nagarnis. Veena Oldenburg in her research also reveals that the tawaifs were the independent and powerful women during the Mughal period. They employed male accompanying musicians, music and dance teachers and sometimes they also appointed pimps if needed, thus following a strong matriarchal society. They were in the highest tax payers section in the society also with individual income. During the Mughal dynasty, the courtesan and tawaif culture had reached to its pinnacle. These tawaifs were begun to consider as the bearer of the North Indian elite classical culture. They traditionally performed Dhrupada, Dhamāra, Urdu poetry decorated with melodies of their own. Later on they started cultivating Kheyāl, Thumrī, Gazal type of songs in the *mehfils* embellished with classical dance called ‘Mujrā’. This tawaif dance or Mujrā were the pieces of Katthak dance incorporated with the influences of Persian and other West Asian dances and some traits of regional folk dances. It is to be said that for a long time North Indian classical dance Katthak was protected from losing its existence by this tawaif class. During 16th -17th century when Mughal reign was at its zenith, Katthak was inextricably linked with the tawaifs. Actually at that time kathak and Mujrā were likely to be synonymous, as because due to the strict patriarchal rules and ‘pardā’ tradition for the common women, art forms were nurtured by the courtesan and tawaif classes only. Also the gurus, who taught classical dances to court dancers, started associating with the tawaifs. Even the patrons of the tawaifs were also cultured and refined art lovers. One of those patrons was ruler of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah who is credited with numerous Katthak pieces. Thus with this association of the musical people and cultural environment Katthak was able to attain its sophisticated position. Tawaifs had also enough contribution in developing Thumrī style. They were expertise in Thumrī. Usually tawaifs performed Thumrīs to entertain their elite clients. Therefore in order to create more magnetic charm they brought several changes in the composition, from Rāga progression to rendition. They also started giving more emphasis on voice modulation to express Rasa, Bhāva and Abhinaya through their voice. Henceforth, for such experimental efforts Indian Classical Music of present days get a unique style of rendering Thumrīs.

Tawaifs and Bājīs in Colonial North India:

Probably around early 18th century the Mughal Empire was started declining. Internal problems led gradual break up of administrative and economic systems. Regional kingdoms were suffering from internal feuds among each other. At this point by the mid-18th century Mughal power became very limited and then after Government of India Act 1858, India became completely over powered by the British rule. The economy of Bengal started dominated by the British and Calcutta became the main centre for trade. Soon after, a class of people started associating with the British Company in their trade and administration though they did not accept the European culture and lifestyle, as till that date Mughal court culture was quite influenced the life style of the elite Bengalis. Rich Zamindārs, Dewans, Beniās, the wealthy people of Bengal were following the court culture of the Mughals; thus emerged a new flamboyant Bengali culture called 'Bābu Culture' in colonial Calcutta. With this, the magnetism and myths of tawaifs gradually faded out and the term 'tawaif' degenerated to simple 'Gānewālī' or 'Bājī'. Like tawaif culture of Mughal court, these Bābus of colonial Calcutta mesmerized by the Bājī culture. They started arranging Bājī dance in their house and garden villas. Even in all religious occasions of Bengalis like Durga puja, Annaprāsana (rice ceremony), marriage ceremony or merely to show off wealth, Bājī dance became essential as a mark of elitism and snobbery.

The increasing craze of 'Bāi-nautch' in the houses of rich people of Calcutta open the doorway of another type of entertainment. The Bābus of Calcutta started arranging Bāi-nautch to gratify their European friends or to make a deal with the British company. Thus, to arrange entertainment parties for the European visitors and at the same time extravagant expenditure as a part of the arrangement became status symbol of the Bābu culture (Joardar 52). This gave rise to nautch parties especially in the Presidency towns. Nautch girls were the low grade dancers who make living by entertaining men, women of classes in various occasions. Generally their dances comprised some traits of regional folk and erotic dances which later turned to 'Khemtā Nāch'. This 'nautch' dances evolved several styles, among them Mor-nāch, Patang-nāch, Kaharkānāch and Zamindāri nāch. Gradually with them Khemtā and Bāi dance came up with unpolished and bawdy language, but were concentrated among the low standard people. However these mere 'Nāchiye-gāyiye meye' or nautch girls were of low status than Bājīs.

Till early 19th century most of the Bājīs were Muslims. They came from different areas of North India. These Paścimā Bājīs had the ancestors who performed in the courts of Muslim and Hindu rulers in medieval period. From the first appearances, these Bājīs became high demand among the elite Bengalis and wealthy people. Soon this craze attracted several Bengali prostitutes to choose the profession of Bājīs. In *Nagarnatikatha* there are references of many Bājīs those live in Bowbazar and its

adjacent areas. Apart from Muslim and Bengali Bājīs, some of them were Anglo-Indian, Jewish and Armenians. Among these Bājīs, Bibi Nikki, Bibi Jaan, Bibi Rashena, Bibi Pani were worth mentioning (Bandopadhyay 35-36). Paścimā Bājīs were par excellence in all respect – song, dance and performances in comparison to Bengali Bājīs. They had rich treasury of Thumrī. They were so popular even among the Bājīs that many Bengali prostitutes used to send their daughters for training under them. Khāndānī Bājīs (pedigreed) used to sing Rāga based songs adorned with *śringāra rasa* and performed a semi classical dance called Mujrā. From late 19th century Katthak was reemphasized while Mujrā continued to be erotic. Thus the way of Katthak and Mujrā separated. From the mid and late 19th century Bengali Bājīs started to engage in Theatre and thus they stopped to be entirely involved in Bājī profession. In colonial Calcutta to cope up with the taste and temperament of the changing society the Bājīs also performed varieties of Bengali songs, Kīrtana, Tappā, Bāul, Śyamāsangīta apart from Gīt, Gazal and Thumrīs. Some of these songs contained beautifully woven words in colonial language that reflected the domestic mood of middle class Bengalis. For example:

Sadā prāna keno cāye?
 Bhālobāsā rmukhe āgun,
 Śatru bere pāye,
 Bhālobese khub jenechi,
 Hāte hate phal peyechi
 Sārārāt kende morechi
 Tomār dhore duti pāye (Chakraborty 128)

The Anti-Nautch movement and the Bājīs:

From the last half of 18th century to early 20th century the roads were not smooth for the tawaifs and the Bājīs. There were twists and turns in every nook and corner all over the way. From the early 18th century the tawaifs started losing their patron Nawabs of different kingdoms in front of colonial domination of British. But they started to adopt the changes. They migrated to Calcutta, took up the style and passion of Bengali and became permanent inhabitants. Again the nationalist movement in the form of social reform such as anti nautch movement started during the late 19th century. The government came up with an official degree where all the class of women performers like Bājī, tawaif, nautch girl, devadāsī were branded as mere prostitutes. Renowned people like Rabindranath Tagore, Rukmini Devi Arundale, Madame Menaka, Pandit V.N. Bhatkhande played a major role in this campaign. In early 20th century, Bhatkhande, Paluskar and other personalities posed themselves as responsible gatekeeper of Indian culture and musical tradition. They helped set the musical standards and the melodies

of tawaif were considered as unchaste. Not only the government campaign but also the western educations also make big differences in the mind set up of the new generation elite Bengalis. Suddenly Bengali Bhadrals (Gentlemen) started feeling uncomfortable with the presence of Bājīs in the cities. They took major step to throw them out from the heart of the city and move them forcefully in the outskirts. At that time the word 'Bājī' became synonymous of 'Veśyā'. The Bājīs those came in contact with the enlightened Bengalis started to think of educating their sons and daughters. Literally how much talented the Bājīs might be, their artistic selves were always tormented by their position in the society even when they were in the peak of their career. So, in spite of being praiseworthy, they were always the 'Nāchnī' or 'Khemtāwālī Veśyā' doing the most sinful job. There was always a stigma in associating with the Bājīs by any means. The gurus to whom these Bājīs used to learn singing and dancing and even Sarangi and the Tabla players (Tabalchi) those were closely associated with the Bājīs often found extreme difficulties to get suitable job for livelihood. Even GauharJaan, the queen of Bājīs was insulted by a popular male singer during her peak time. All these circumstances and also the arrival of the Theatre and Gramophone changed the world of Bājīs.

However, it will be quite unjustified not to include here the positive changes that took place in the cultural domain of Bengal through the Bājīs. In 1856, Nawab of Lucknow Wajid Ali Shah was forcefully being secluded to Calcutta by the British government. Here in Metiabruz, he again set up his *darwar* where a number of courtesans were again appointed as court singers those came with him from Lucknow. Many Bājīs from different towns also came to be the part of his darwar. Bājīs from Lucknow and Banaras were noted for their prowess in Thumrīs. Wajid Ali Shah despite of being thrown out from his throne spent million on Mujrās. Thus music lovers of Calcutta got to taste the real 'Lucknowi' and 'Banarasi' Thumrī from the renowned Bājīs. There were several names – Munsharimwali Gauhar, Zoharbai, Mustaribai, Malkajan etc. Among them, Malkajan was a renowned singer, dancer, poet and songwriter. The queen of Bājīs, GauharJaan was her daughter. Gauhar was called 'The nightingale of Bengal' and was one of those fortunate who recorded their voice in Gramophone. Gramophone Company came to Calcutta approximately in the year 1902 – 1903 to record the talented voices of Bengal. Mustaribai, GauharJaan, Indumati, Ascharjamoyee, Krishnabhamini etc recorded their voice. GauharJaan in her first disc has recorded a Khyāl in Rāga Jogiyā on 2nd November, 1902, ended up with a note announced 'My name is GauharJaan'. Within 1913 GauharJaan had sung in 40 records which are still considered as a treasure trove. Besides GauharJaan, there were several names like Noorjahan Begum, ShrijanBai, JaddanBai, Rani Sundari, Ascharjamoyee, Rajabala, Radharani, Swetangini, Kiranmoyee, Indubala, Angurbala, Suroma etc enriched the music lovers by their singing skill in late 19th and early 20th century. With all this

records the voices of Bājīs became very available to the common mass and the fantasy that grew with Bājīs faded out (Mukherjee: 20-21).

During this time Bengali women were like ‘Caged Birds’. They were subjugated by the name of chastity, tradition, custom and religion. To them singing and dancing were sinful act and were not allowed to perform in front of public. It was also the period when newly enlightened Bengalis started inclined towards theatre rather than BāiNāch. So gradually theatre became a finer replacement of Bāi performances. Several theatre directors became interested to take many Bājīs in the female characters. So that becomes a brighter source of income for the Bājīs rather than entertaining the people in filthy mehfil. Therefore, talented Bājīs like Gangamani, Binodini Dasi, Jadumani, Rajabala joined the theatre and became the pillar of the theatres (Mukherjee 22). After Gramophone records and theatres, film industry also brought a new dimension in the world of Bājīs. Bombay (Mumbai) film industry was ruled by the Muslim Bājīs from its very beginning. JaddanBai was one of the pioneers of Bombay film industry. She was also a Thumrī artist of Columbia Gramophone Company. Later she moved to Bombay for recognition. Famous film actress Nargis was her daughter. Another was NaseemBanu, who was believed to be the first female superstar of Indian cinema. She was the mother of talented actress ShairaBanu. Jahanara Begum who as KajjanBai was a dancer in Calcutta Club previously, got fame as an actress in the movie *Laila Majnu* where she also sang twenty songs. She was used to get higher remuneration than even Kundanlal Sehgal. MeenaKumari’s mother Prabhabati and Neemi’s mother Wahida were also singer and actress of Bombay Talkies. Another one is also worth mentioning. Fatima Begum, the first female director of Indian cinema, established ‘Fatima films’ which was later came to known as ‘Victoria-Fatima Films’ in 1928. Her daughter Zubeida acted in India’s first ever talkie Ardeshir Irani’s *Alam Ara* (Arfeen 1688 – 1689).

A new dawn of modern India saw the dynamic changes in socio-economic-cultural arena. However, after Independence, the luck and condition of Gānewālis or Bājīs were not so much changed. The courtesans, who played an unacknowledged part in the freedom movement, were paid back with cruelty after Independence. Music was their ‘soul’ but All India Radio announced that Tawaifs and Bājīs were not allowed to enter the studios of All India Radio because of the shameful burden of ‘Bāi’ suffix that attached with their names. Many renowned Bājīs started getting married or simply tried to hide their identity by adding ‘Devi’ or ‘Begum’ after their names to record their voices in All India Radio. However, Indian government tried to take few initiatives to release Bājīs from their long distressful neglected lives by providing long desired liberation from the stigma of being impure. The Bājīs those had star values through their recordings in Gramophones, achieved popularity and success as concert artists at ticketed performances. Thus, they achieved their deserved recognition and

appreciation by getting introduced to sophisticated pan-Indian audiences through public concerts. Some of the artisans like Siddheswari Devi, Rasoolan Bai, Mustari Bai, Zohra Bai Ambalewali, Roshanara Begum etc got national accreditation from Sangeet Natak Academy. Siddheswari Devi was felicitated with the 'Padmashri' award by the Government of India, Honorary D.Lit. degree by the Rabindra Bharati University of Kolkata, Desikottam degree by the Visva Bharati Vishwavidyalaya, while Roshanara Begum got the title of 'Sitara-e-Imtiaz' by the President of Pakistan.

Time has changed. Bājīs have been freed from being dangerously outcaste, yet every aspect of their life is not of jasmine fragrance. There are still many stories of ignorance and hatred. The Gānewālīs and Bājīs were forced to vacate their ancestral houses by the puritans after Independence. Many of them had to choose the path of prostitution or to do some odd jobs for livelihood. Rasoolan Bai, once the famous artisan, managed to live by selling tea near All India Radio where she used to get invitation for singing before Independence. The scenario of negligence and hatred still remain same under layered in this 21st century also. Zarina Begum, perhaps the last descendant of a courtesan of Awadh's royal court, was trained under Begum Akhtar and mesmerized the audiences through Baithakī Thumrī till 50's and 60's. She was a regular radio artist since 1950. She had also performed in Doordarshan and in few films but never got the recognition that she deserved. In her last days when she was counting her breathes in a private hospital (*she died on 12th May 2018 at the age of 88) totally abandoned from this cultural society, her last wish to U.P. government was a job for her daughter or an e-rickshaw for her physically challenged son (TOI). This is only a single reference. There are several 'Zarina Begum' in this independent country waiting silently in the barren kothās for help. Such women performers of 21st century are still carrying the label 'unchaste' with them. Reba Muhuri in her book *Thumri o Baiji* says "According to my baba, all these talented baijis who are hated by people are 'Gāndharvīs'. Actually it is our bad luck that we never show the respect that they really deserve" (14-15).

This article is homage to all those celestial 'Gāndharvīs' who protect and preserve the heritage of Indian music generation after generation bearing all the humiliation and hatred. They will always be remembered for the struggle they did to achieve the equality in this male chauvinist musical world. This article reflects their fight, their flight. The pen writes their pain as the soul wishes to sing the 'unchaste' melody in harmony with their voice which has many tales to tell.

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Reimagining Mythical Women in Twentieth Century: A Study of Selective Texts of *Jatra*

Smriti Chowdhuri

From times immemorial mythological themes have been used as convenient tools to transfuse social justice and moral edification in illiterate and semiliterate people. Complicated social situation, inexplicable philosophies or any moral impasse can be installed in the naïve minds through the allegorical garb of mythological stories very easily. *Jatra* (sometimes people call it *pala*)¹ is not an exception. *Jatra*'s origin in the religious cradle defined its obvious evolution through the mythological stories. It was the socio-political ambience of India in twentieth century that brought transformation in *Jatra* in terms of secular themes as analogous to many of the other forms of art. And the impact of the modernization was so that it rendered religious and mythical *palas* almost redundant as the century closes itself. Emergence of women actors in the all-male world of *Jatra* in twentieth century has also proved to be a major page turner in the altered portrayal of women in the world of modern *Jatra*. What is interesting about the adoption of mythological *pala* in twentieth century is that the devotional elements which were earlier used to be the primary objective of performance, relegated to the background and contemporary political and social concern crept into the stage. The spirit of liberalism imbued even in the writers of *Jatra* the zeal to look at mythology from diverse perspectives. Modern visions were spread through the primal metaphor of mythology. Secularized ethos of independent India changed the adoption and appropriation of mythology in the new context.

I

If mythological themes are the key issues then the *Jatra* from its inception to its long historical tradition owes its origin to what is described as *Deblila* (literally translated as the play of the Gods). All themes were exclusively from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Puranas* and the *Manusamhita*. Two themes were however formalized as the *RamJatra* and the *KrisjnaJatra*. (Dutt24)

According to some critics, it is not *Deblila* (play of God) but *Debilila* (play of Goddesses) that predates in *Jatra*. The early remnants of *Jatra* as recovered from the debated and anonymous historiography of *Jatra*'s beginning, are about the

glorification of Shakti (primeval cosmic energy embodied as a divine feminine). It is believed that prior to the rejuvenation and canonization of *Jatra* as a standard folk form by Shri Chaitanyac Dev, *Shakti Jatra* was in vogue. “The ancient *Jatras* that were prevalent in Bengal were about the cult of Sakti worship...” (Das Gupta 112). This kind of *Jatra* would recount the valiant feats of Goddesses especially the cult of *Devi Chandi* killing demons named *Sambhu*, *Nisambhu* and *Mahisasuras*. Evidently woman in such *Jatra*, was seen as an embodiment of justice and power but only when conceded as the incarnation of supernatural power. *Shakti Jatra* basically served the purpose of morality play exhibiting the eternal clash between good and evil forces and the ultimate triumph of the former. Moral message was delivered as embedded in the religious stories.

With the spread of *Vaishnavism* in Bengal, especially under the influence of *Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*, *Jatra* reorganized itself in the mythic saga of Krishna, eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Episodes (*pala*) from the life of Krishna provided adequate materials to be dramatized in *Jatra*. Different phases of His life or *lila* enfolded different *rasas* (theory of *rasa*) to sway the hearts of audience *Sringara* (erotic) and *karuna* (pathetic) *rasa* being dominant of those. Radha is at the center of *palas* that dealt with both of these *rasas*. “The eastern variety of *Vaishnavism* taught the religion of love symbolized by Radha and Krishna” (Durgadas 57). It is fascinating to note the switching of the image of woman from Rama’s dutiful wife (Sita) to the desperate, rule-defying lover (Radha) of Krishna. The shift was from demonstrating the societal conscious behavior of a woman to the internal desire of a woman. The character of Radha became identified with the inner self of a woman. Through Radha *palakar* tried to touch the hidden cord of the women spectator’s heart. They readily recognized the internal pangs of Radha as a lover because through her a woman’s inner plane found expression in the open arena. Though her transgression from the societal norms and refusal of wifely duties was not an ideal image to be followed, Radha as an image of universal lover became popular. Erotic elements present in the relation between Radha and Krishna as the prototype of male and female entity surcharged the otherwise devotional performance with earthly resonance. Before the secularization of *Jatra* and substitution of the divine love plots with lewd earthly love stories of human kind, dalliance of Radha-Krishna provided the scope for importing profanity through sexual innuendos. Thus the liaison of Radha and Krishna soon became the favorite section to be performed as *pala*.

Image of woman changed as *Jatra* became affected with the critical political situations like Swadeshi³ movement and various movements for freedom of India. The legendary *palakar* and *swadeshi* activist Mukndo Das’s famous *pala*, *Matripuja* (Worship of Mother) is an exemplar of the idolization of woman at that time. Women’s personal suffering and voice was somehow obscured under the shadow of these national

phenomena. Image of woman merged with the image of “*BharatMata*” (Mother-India). In the mythological themes of *Jatra*, the image of woman found appropriate representation either in the form of *Shakti* who can slay the evil demons (British army) to save people (Indians) from their oppression or in the form of Sita (India), captivated by some foreign force (British Raj). What Bhatia says about theatre is also true in case of *Jatra*.

Playwrights either projected the violence committed against women as a violation of the community or national honor, or constructed the image of the female activist as one willing to sacrifice her life in defense of the nation...the changing roles of women were thus formulated primarily in the interest of patriarchal nationalist discourse. (Bhatia 111)

II

With the termination of British Empire, *Swadeshi-Jatra* lost its relevance. Artists recognized new problems of Postcolonial India. In pre-independent era it was easy to identify and classify the symbolization of God and demon in their social context but the democratic twilight of twentieth century created confusion in the binary. For example Rama was heroic as long as he was fighting with a foreign oppressor for the honor of woman and nation. But in the post-Ravana period, Rama could not do justice to his own people. Rather character of Rama has been cast as a representative of patriarchal society due to his decision of banishing his wife, Sita.

The modern *palakers* were very conscious in choosing appropriate sections from the mythological narratives to suit the context, relevance and their purpose. For example in *palas* like *Exile of Sita* and *Ramrajya*, Brajen De picked up the controversial sections from the epic Ramayana. They don't deal with the exploits of Lord Rama as a valiant soldier. Rather they challenge his position as a rightful king or administrator. Ram has been seen as the symbol of a crippled government who failed in his duties of disseminating equality. His utter failure as a pioneer of democracy and equality is attested in two fatal decisions of his life- banishment of Sita and slaying of Shambuka, the king of *Shudras*⁴. These two *palas* take up two major issues- suppression of *Shudra* and injustice to woman. *Sitar Bonobasa* deals with as the name suggests the exile of Sita who has been sacrificed in the name of tradition and honor while *Ramrajya* argues against the assassination of Shambuka, local leader of *Shrudas* community at the hand of Rama for aspiring social mobility. In both the *palas* the exploitation of woman and marginalization of Dalits are brought together as the “other” of the patriarchal power paradigm.

In an insightful essay named “Rama and Krishna in few *Jatrapala*” Tarun De, son of famous *Jatra palakar* Brajen De, elaborately reflects on the textual depiction

of the divine incarnations in Jatra. Like his father he believes in the anthropomorphic view of these two characters as fictional creation to disseminate idealism in chaotic human world. He has pointed out his father's consciousness of the dangerous side of religious fanaticism that comes as a corollary to the deification of such characters. Thus he pointed out the writer's attempt to contextualize and reinterpret mythology in modern age to save it from being rigid and at the same time to reestablish its relevance.

In the preface to his *pala Rajlakshmi* (1364) which later was edited and remodeled in a prosaic format in the name of *Sitar Bonobas* (1382) to suit contemporary taste, Brajen De clearly mentions his objective and vision regarding the portrayal of Sita. His originality of thought gets itself punctuated in conceiving a mythological character going against its traditional portrayal. He writes:

The story of "*Rajlakshmi*" Sita is an exemplar of the indifferent treatment women received in this country in ancient times. Society had no sensibility towards the separate identity of woman who was seen as the property of men and woman too had internalized her humiliated subordinate role through a long habitual process... it does not matter how much Rama is glorified as an ideal character, his decision of banishing Sita will remain an act of weakness or failure on his part. He has sacrificed his love to become a good king. On the other hand, though Sita has saved her husband from embarrassment by obeying his order without resisting, has disgraced the self-respect and honor of her sex. One who does injustice and other who tolerates it are equally guilt-ridden. (Das 248) [Translation mine]

Brajen De continues to state his objective behind this attempt to look at mythology from a new angle and especially his sensitivity towards the rights of a woman. Writing basically for a semi-literate village folk, he could not expect an overnight revolution but asserts his hope on women audience who can possibly learn to respect themselves. He tried to destabilize the images of women they had revered and emulated. The *palakar* is satisfied if he can initiate at least a suspicion of established ideas.

Writing the preface to the *pala* named *Sitar Bonobasa*, Tarun Kumar Dey explains that Brojen De has adorned the story in a new format ignoring the conventional belief. He writes -

In this *pala*, Sita is the central figure who has been imagined in two manifestations - firstly as a woman and metaphorically as *Bhoomi Lakshmi*.... representing agricultural fertility while Valmiki's character entails both the pangs of a creative poet and as a social critic. [Translation mine]

Sitar Bonobas is a well-known and controversial chapter from the great Indian epic *Ramayana*. After completing fourteen years of exile (Vanavasa), Rama returns to *Ayodhya* with wife Sita and brother Lakshmana and establishes a prosperous ordered society called *Ramrajya*. Literally meaning the state governed by Rama, *Ramrajya* is a familiar word prevalent in Hindu community which suggests a utopic state of administration. Though this portion of this story culminating in the ideal state of humanitarian society seems to be a perfect ending-scene or conclusion for the epic, it moves further with another unjustified banishment from the kingdom. There is a second exile in the epic. This time innocent Sita is banished by Rama falsely charged with impurity that jeopardizes the very concept of *Ramrajya*. Brajen De has ingeniously used the concept of *Ramrajya* to purvey a critical assessment of post-colonial state of Indian administration to the popular mind. *Ramrajya* in that sense is synonymous to democratic India where Sita (Motherland) emancipated from the foreign force (Ravana) is heading towards. Ravana has been mentioned as non-Aryans which includes the British force as well.

The *pala* of *Sitar Bonobas* instead of detracting from the central concern of the story i.e. exile of Sita due to over emphasis on Valmiki's inner conflict and allegorical complexity contemplates over the victimization of Sita. Throughout the *pala*, Sita could not transcend from the conventional frame of a woman's role in a society. She accepts her fate with a divine taciturnity and nonchalance. But Brajen De used the subplot to satirize Sita's domicile behavior. In the subplot, Sindhu and Kaveri play the part of lovers in parallel to the ideal union between Rama and Sita. Kaveri repeatedly refers and tries to emulate the love between Rama and Sita as a model of ideal couple which is common practice among Hindus till now. However the character of Sindhu is practical and strongly criticizes platonic concept of love and all romanticism attached to the institution of marriage even before the incident of banishing of Sita by Rama took place. He criticizes the indifference and over-simplicity of Sita as a wife who accepts her husband's words as dictum without any protest. He claims that Sita is also responsible for her tragic condition since she never fought for her rights. Valmiki's ashram in the forest named *Tapovana* acts as a sort of Forest of Arden found in Shakespeare's *As you like it*. It acts like a pocket of exception to the mainstream society where principles of society are challenged and reversed. It is not difficult to recognize the author reflected in the character of Valmiki and the ashram acting as a poetic idealism where the author ensures security to woman and envisages inter-caste marriage. Thus we see Sindhu, a representative of higher caste and class professing love to Kaveri, a lower caste woman.

Ending of the *pala Sitar Bonobasa* is spectacular as it has been altered by the *palakar*. Going against the scriptural record of the conclusion where Sita gives the fire ordeal, Sita in Brajen De's *pala* refuses to undergo a second trial of her chastity.

There is a strong sense of self respect and dignity in her voice as a woman as she refuses Rama's order. Moreover Sita announces in front of everyone that it is she who has given martial training to her sons who have defeated the force of Rama. Thus it is in a way Sita who has defeated the proud military force of Rama though she needs male agency to fight the patriarchy. Nonetheless it challenges and defeats the vanity of martial and physical prowess of masculine model of society.

Suicidal glorification in patriarchal society as ingrained in the scriptural teaching of the culture is not questioned. Suicidal tendencies of women in patriarchal society are not new. It is ingrained in the scriptural teaching of the culture. Sita's anger and frustration with the injustices of the society found expression in her ultimate disappearance inside Mother Earth. It acts as the only source power she poses to resist patriarchal encroachments. In the *pala* named *Upekhita* (Ignored one) also deals with the similar issue, considering the possibility for a woman to get justice in a male-controlled society when the fight is against the head of justice itself. Amba the heroine of the *pala* finds herself in a similar situation as Sita fighting against the injustices done to her by the very person regarded as the paradigm of virtue and values. The *pala Upekhita* by Brajen De deals with the branch story from the *Adi* and *Udyoga Parva* (section) of *Mahabharata* centering on the characters Bhishma and Amba. Amba is tragic figure of the *pala*. She is the ignored one (*upekhita*). In the preface to the *pala* the author writes that nobody has taken up the story in the last forty years. Choice of the story itself is an act of protest and mode of voicing the hushed off chapters of woman's textual representation.

The *pala Upekhita* tells the story of Bhishma's forceful abduction of the three princesses from the *Swayamvara* (ceremony of choosing one's own husband) against their will as an act of revenge on their father, king of Kashi. Bhishma brings them to his kingdom to get them married with his step brother. Though the younger sisters agree to get married, Amba the elder one refuses. When Amba tells Bhishma that she has given her heart to another king named Salva, Bhishma readily sends her back with honor. But Salva refuses to marry her since she has been touched by some other man. In heavy heart, she returns to Bhishma and implores him to marry her since she had been seized by him. Bhishma having promised to remain a lifelong bachelor does not accept the proposal. When everyone fails in breaking Bhishma's vow of celibacy, Amba takes oath to be the reason of Bhishma's death. The *pala* ends with Amba's willing death by fire so that she can be reborn as a transgender to put an end to Bhishma's life. Throughout the *pala*, Amba's image as a straight forward speaker is remarkable. She always voices her protest against the wrongs done to her. She leaves the covetous status of being the queen of India's most powerful kingdom for love. She isn't frightened to reprimand and censure the most powerful man, Bhishma. Brajen De has broken the stereotype of a woman as a meek and weak person. Amba gets

disheartened by the rejection of her fiancé but doesn't create a melodramatic scene of crying and pleading. She curses and condemns him. Even when her fiancé becomes ready to accept her as his wife after his guru Parashurama's mediation, Amba rejects him herself. There are numerous fiery dialogues that register protest against the male, authoritative actions as depicted in the mythology. Though Amba has to kill herself at the end of the *pala* but she promises to return and continue her protest even in the next birth.

Swargo Hote Biday (Farewell to Heaven) is a mythological *pala* by Voirob Ganguly. The story itself is very uncommon in respect of being a mythical topic. It questions the authenticity and viability of the Aryan texts in the representation of non-Aryans. Thus it simultaneously challenges our internalized sense of right and wrong as permeated in religious scriptures. Central storyline is the elopement of Tara (star), wife of Vrihaspati (Jupiter as the Guru of Gods) by his disciple Chandra (moon God) who is already married to Rohini. After abducting Tara, Chandra takes refuge with the demons. A fight ensues between the forces of God and demons. The story finds a parallel with Rama's fight with Ravana to rescue Sita as does Vrihaspati to claim his wife but the battle was no more in a black and white format. Tara was not abducted against her will as she confesses herself how she was enamored by the beauty of Chandra. She was not captured by Demon rather was sheltered by Demons. The world of demons, marginalized sector becomes the harbor of security to a woman fleeing from the oppressive society. The image of independent Tara becomes confusing as she starts suffering terrible mental dilemma after committing adultery. Voirob Ganguly could not break the stereotype of a woman in the image of Tara and Rohini, wife of Chandra. While Tara after committing an extra marital affair suffers due to the sense of morality and purity, Rohini, after knowing her husband's infidelity, pardons him and even goes to the extent of doing penance to get him recovered and back to her. Tara and Rohini in that sense are reinforcements of extreme binary of woman as an angel at home and a fallen angel in a patriarchal society. The *pala* subverts the mythical binary between *Devi* (Goddess) and *Danavi* (lady demon) and the accepted supremacy of one over the other in the portrayal of Tara, a *Devi* and Kayadhu, a *Danavi*. This *pala* failed to transcend the stereotype image of a woman as a subservient wife in the character of Rohini.

In the *pala Shapmochan*, Voirob Ganguly has taken the story from *Shaivism* theology, though we find that the cult of *Vishnu* has been a more dominant strand in Jatra. In the preface to the *pala*, the *palakar* has humorously talked about the primordial conflict over the supremacy between male and female sexes and expresses his humble hope of finding a clue to its resolution. In the beginning of the *pala*, Lord Shiva and his wife Goddess Durga fall out on the question that who is more powerful amongst them. Each of them claims to be the supreme and being unable to resolve the issue decides

to testify their supremacy by testing the faith of their disciples on earth. Thus we find there is a *pala* within a *pala*. Shiva curses Durga's faithful follower Vedoboti to be doomed throughout her life and Durga gives her blessings to be fortunate as a challenge. However the character of Vedoboti is created in the same clay as that of Rohini in the former *pala*. She has been conceived as an embodiment of ideal wife whose chastity can bring back her husband from the gates of death. There are long but engaging verbal exchanges between Shiva and Durga which exquisitely address the battle of gender in a dialogic frame. Moreover the *pala* ends with Shiva along with Brahma and Vishnu acknowledging the supreme power of Durga and surrendering before her wish. However like ritual plays, *Shapmochan* ends with the invocation of Shiva-Durga and subsequent blessings by them to the audience.

It can also be noticed that *Jatra* being an aesthetic medium for the periphery and from the periphery widens the schism present in the gender hierarchy of our society. It is difficult to say whether deliberately or not the case of the woman from marginalized sections is strengthened as they are capable of exercising more freedom in both action and expression in comparison to their elite counterpart. In *Sitar Bonobasa* the docile, submissive character of Sita who unquestioningly accepts the unfair order of her husband has been foiled against the character of Shitala, a garrulous, quarrelsome wife who does not refrain from using abusive language to reprimand her husband's wrong doing. So also the character of Kaveri censures Rama vehemently in her protest against the injustice done to Sita. In *Sitar Bonobasa*, Kaveri sings the manifesto of a freedom loving woman.

KAVERI. Jodi bole thaki kono din.

Tomar chorone bandhiya robo chiro poradhin.

Se kotha vuliyo priyo,

Aamare khoma korio,

Sonar khanchay dibonako dhora, hobo na chirobin.

Khule gache mor o nyoner dhuli,

Sore gache moho jonjal guli,

Purusher joto modhumakha buli osar mulyohin.(1.8.100-101)

KAVERI. If I had said to you ever.

That I will be chained and be yours forever.

Forget those words my dear,

Forgive me here,

To efface my identity I will not surrender to your golden favor.

Now I have a clear vision

Dissolved all illusion,

The honey-coated words of men are useless and over. [Translation mine]

Jatra by nature is melodramatic and the image of vulnerable mythic women provides the scope of introducing histrionic melancholia needed for its spectacular theatricality. Evaluating from that standpoint, the above mentioned *palas* shows remarkable modernity in blending the primeval charm of mythology with realism as a demand of the time. The female figures outshine their male counterpart. Credit should be given to those *palakars* who have gone out of their way to represent their case from their point of view. They have shown the caliber of breaking the conventional portrait of a mythical woman as encrypted and perpetuated in scriptures.

III

Thus it can be seen that Mythological *palas* in the hands of modern *Jatra palakars* in spite of their seemingly conformity towards traditional values often destabilize them and opens up multiple viewpoints. Karnad has rightly observed this flexibility and innate energy of folk theatre.

...while it seems to support traditional values, it is also capable of subverting them, looking at them from various points of view. The conventions of the chorus, the mask, and the comic episode permit the simultaneous presentation of widely divergent points of view, some of them even reconcilable with each other. (Karnad 347)

Allegory is an important part of mythological *Jatra* especially in the context of twentieth century. Being remodeled in this age of realism, allegory penetrated in multiple facets of a mythological *pala*. Neelima Talvar has talked about the innate flexibility of mythic as well as intermediary forms in her essay "Theatre of Development in Independent India". She has suggested at the possible interchange between the ancient world-view in mythic drama and modern world-view in those of intermediary forms. Referring to the convictions of Gunwardana regarding intermediary theatre, she traced its evolution towards the "theatre of development" (109). It is interesting to see how *Jatra* does justice to the modern allegorical intent.

It is astounding to witness that a regional popular theatre like *Jatra* could upgrade itself to that extent, that it could absorb complexity of thought in its otherwise simplistic frame and feature. Achievement of such *Jatra palakar* cannot be ignored or undermined alleging them being inartistic. They deserve acclamation especially when their job was far more difficult since they write for an audience unlike the comparatively erudite theatre-audience for whom it was not easy to catch the latent meaning. Thus it becomes an arduous job to attempt and achieve their desired objective. In spite of

the alleged charges of profanity and sensationalism, *Jatra* has been used as a powerful medium to evoke social consciousness and gender sensitization in such able hands. *Jatra palakar*'s like Brajen De and Virob Ganguly questioned mythology as an endorsement of ruling class and priests who try to perpetuate their advantageous system in the name of tradition. They endeavor to expose the politics of scriptural representation. They have recuperated mythological resources to expedite their secular ventures in the postcolonial society with unprecedented alacrity and originality within the genre.

Notes

1. *Pala* means chapter or section. Different chapters of epics were performed by dividing them in smaller units. An individual performance or text of *Jatra* in Bengal is called *pala* and its script writer is called *palakar*.
2. He was the proponent of *Vaishnavism* in the tradition of Bhakti yoga. He was also a pioneering figure in the regeneration of *Jatra* in Bengal. He used to play the female roles of Radha and Rukmini in early performances of *Jatra*.
3. *Swadeshi* movement (1905-1917) started in Bengal in 1905 as a protest against Lord Curzon's declaration of the partition of Bengal. *Swadeshi-Jatra* pioneered by Mukundo Das became very popular in Bengal.
4. *Shudra* is the laboring class, the lowest rung of the four social categories or *Varna* system prevalent in Hindu society.

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Reading the ‘*Tawaif*’ : A Study of *Pakeezah*, *Umrao Jaan*, *Tawaif* and *Devdas*

Jayati Ganguly

The idea of a ‘Courtesan’ or ‘*Tawaif*’ in India has not only undergone a semiotic shift but also a massive paradigmatic and ideological shift. This shift is suggestive of the constructed nature of this culture and that of the social identity known as ‘*Tawaif*’. Being a *tawaif* has more serious implications than merely a profession for a class of women, it is a complex social culture. Beginning with the grandeur of the Mughal courts, with the passage of time, the culture has shown a wholly new face and has changed the position of the courtesan women in society. This paper proposes to study four Hindi films, *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jaan* (1981), *Tawaif* (1985) and *Devdas* (2002) to locate how the *tawaif* / culture has been represented with all its socio-historical/political aspects looming large and the way it is perceived by those directly involved and by the society as a whole. The paper interrogates whether the women protagonists, as represented in these movies, emerge as various kinds of socio-cultural constructs. It studies how these ‘constructs’ victimize the *tawaif* women and relegate them to a completely gendered position in the society. The paper also attempts to read if some aspects in the films show possibilities of the *tawaifs*’ liberation and autonomous identity.

Today, if the word ‘Courtesan’ is googled, the instant meaning that pops up on screen is “a prostitute, especially one with wealthy upper-class clients” (*Google.com*). “The Urdu word, *tawaif*. . . is defined in at least one Urdu dictionary as, ‘a dancing girl, a prostitute; a female singer’” (Booth 1). Over time, the word has gained a narrow meaning, suggestive of a culture that is considered to be ‘fallen’ / ‘degraded’. Quite contrary to the ideas of ‘social morality’ and ‘high culture’, the courtesan or *tawaif* culture in India, in the late colonial and postcolonial era has come to be seen as a degraded and cursed life for the women in this profession and a canker for the society. The *tawaif* culture is wrapped in various discourses (Foucauldian sense) or ideological perspectives. Such discourses give rise to a number of social constructs and, as Foucault insisted, become major tools for exercising power. Identity, respectability, social position and autonomy are often determined by such powerful discourses, thus subjugating and victimising some (in this case, the *tawaifs*). Such constructs may also shape the perceptions of the subject regarding himself/herself which hinders individualistic identity formation. Mehru Jaffer writes:

... at the peak of feudal times, *tawaif*. . . was not another word for a prostitute. Instead, the very mention of a *kotha*, or the first floor salon of a *tawaif*, conjured up images of an existence overflowing with high culture . . . (“The Courtesan of Deception”)

A. Srinivasan says that the Indian courtesans pervade pre-colonial art, literature, mythology and were the “keepers of culture”, they performed at princely courts where *nautches* (anglicised form of ‘*nach*’) or ‘dance performances’ were held by Indian kings and nobility who patronised them, for entertaining the British officials and retained a central part in culture until the 1930s (qtd. in Morcom 32). The history of how the preservers of the rich Indian culture and arts, classical dance and music ultimately were relegated to the status of prostitutes and social outcasts needs to be established before analysing their portrayal in the films. There are a number of aspects which make the *tawaif* a product of all kinds of constructs like history, sexuality, education, gender, class, power, politics, ideologies of ethics, economic status and especially, the ‘institution of marriage’ as a marker of ‘respectability’ and inclusion in mainstream society.

Ethnographic and historical studies excavate a number of reasons—political, ideological, and imperial—for the paradigm shift in the *tawaif* culture. Another attempt by the British Government to ‘orientalise’/‘exoticize’, justify their right to rule, civilize and purify the ‘orients’ evidently brought about a “stigmatisation . . . loss of status and livelihood of hereditary female performers in colonial India” (Morcom 32). The older courtesans interviewed by Oldenburg believed that “it was official British policy to malign the courtesans and the culture of salons, in order to justify the British role as usurpers of the throne of Awadh in 1856” (Oldenburg 265). The deposition of the king of Lucknow, Wajid Ali Shah, resulted in the complete downfall in the economic and social status of the courtesans. Sachdeva states that *tawaif* was not a term for a caste initially but gradually became amalgamated with other groups of singing and dancing girls; by the late nineteenth or early twentieth century all distinctions were erased by census reports of the British and included all into a caste of prostitutes (qtd. in Morcom 34-35). The Anti-*nautch* Movement was an ideological discourse, a Victorian imposition by the British. It was a social purity movement in India fuelled by ideologies of nationalism. Anti-*nautch* propaganda presented *nautch* as a social evil (39). Morcom relates the conflict a female erotic performer presents to patriarchy, the very act of dancing before a male audience, dance being an embodied art and the dancer being on display in a male space is the most unacceptable as under traditional norms of patriarchy a woman must be owned and controlled by father and finally her husband (3). The cinematic representation has mostly captured this ‘fallen’ and gendered aspect of *tawaif* culture.

All the four films have been released in the post-independence era and portray a time where *tawaifs* are already an outcast class of prostitutes isolated from the mainstream society. They are already products of historical, political and ideological constructs in the real world. *Pakeezah*, directed by Kamal Amrohi is the story of a *tawaif* Sahib Jan (Meena Kumari) who grows up in her aunt Nawab Jan's *kotha*, falls in love with and finally is married to Salim (Raaj Kumar). *Umrao Jaan*, directed by Muzaffar Ali is based on Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's Urdu novel *Umrao Jan Ada* (1905); it's the story of a Lucknow *tawaif* Umrao Jaan (Rekha), sold in childhood grows up in Khanum Jan's *kotha*, loves a Nawab and yet is a victim of social restrictions. *Tawaif*, directed by B. R. Chopra has a comic mould where a *tawaif* Sultana (Rati Agnihotri) accidentally finds shelter in Dawood's (Rishi Kapoor) house, who works in a publishing house. *Devdas*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali is an adaptation of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Devdas* (1917), the lead characters being Devdas (Shah Rukh Khan), Parvati or Paro (Aishwarya Rai) and the *tawaif* Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit). This epic love story is the third Hindi cinematic adaptation with all the glamour and extravaganza of modern day filmmaking. Even after so many years, in the third Hindi version of *Devdas*, the *tawaif's* story has been inalienably integrated into the plot. This shows how the subject has been of tremendous interest to filmmakers. Apart from business purposes and aesthetic / imaginative recreation, whether the movies, as cultural products, become tools of progressive social change or just capture a culture in a certain way, is a matter of study and debate.

Firstly, the *tawaifs* may be seen as linguistic/semiotic constructs in these films. The kind of terms or nomenclature used to refer to these women hold pregnant connotations of abuse and despise. Terms usually used in history/society as well as in the films to generalise these *tawaifs* as prostitutes are *Baiji*, *Beshya* (*Beswa*), *Randi*, *Rakheyl* (kept woman), '*Bazaar Aurat*' (marketable women), *Nach-wali* (Dancing girl). Ratnabali Chatterjee accounts that historically, there was a hierarchy among the *tawaifs*, for example, the *Randi* were lower rank prostitutes than the *tawaif*. "The British refused to recognise these hierarchical differences among "prostitutes" in Lucknow for administrative convenience . . ." (Chatterjee 21). She records that the British soldiers who went to the *tawaif* to learn *Tamiz* (manners) and *Tehzeeb* (culture) did not know their language, were satisfied with plain sex and equated the epitomes of aristocratic culture with market prostitutes (21). *Randi* had no such disreputable connotations before the nineteenth century, rather etymologically referred to widows who could act in Marathi theatre (Morcom 214). Even *Baiji* meant court dancers and musicians, especially of Mughal courts (Chatterjee 33) but was also conflated with 'prostitute'. It must be argued that such blurring of categories among prostitutes, singing and dancing girls and use of such pejorative connotations by distorting terms, modifying their etymology and using them as generic terms causes the *Tawaif*-class

to be a major linguistic/semiotic construct. It is only by misapplication and malpractice of a confused and pejorative use that the terms acquired such demeaning connotations, found common acceptance and circulation resulting in their abuse as harlots, whores and zealots with no 'woman/human' identity. As the films portray this culture in the twentieth century independent India, there seems a lack of research; they continue the common synonymous usage of these terms, without any distinction or clarification about their original meanings and therefore, rather than informing the audience of a discursive malpractice, they put it into more vigorous circulation.

Dialogues in the films are effectively written to portray how *tawaifs* are made clearly aware of their 'hateful' and 'untouchable' position/identity in the society of 'respectable' people. These also highlight the gender roles society has defined for women and how social respectability and acceptability are based on strictly conforming to these roles. There are innumerable occasions of insult from other men/women who consider themselves to belong to *shareef* or *bhadra* (respectable) classes having 'proper' familial roots, unlike the *tawaif*. Some of the men who are clients of *tawaifs* leave no chance to insult them if they refuse to provide services. The *tawaifs* are made to feel that they are insignificant, mere plaything to the men, meant for temporary pleasure and easily bought in a few annas. In *Umrao Jaan* when Umrao, deeply in love with Nawab Sultaan, sings to him, an erratic low class client rushes into her room and demands to be served. On being refused he abuses saying, a *Randi's kotha* is meant to serve everybody. He insults the young Nawab charging him for being hypocritical who talks about respectability and honour of his mother on one hand but frequents a *Randi's kotha* on the other. Thus the client reinforces the binary of the respectability of a mother and the disrepute and dishonour of a *tawaif* woman. Later when Umrao goes to meet the Nawab to a palace, an old lady-servant bursts with disgust for the *tawaifs* and expresses her wish to kill Umrao. She says one should even escape the shadow of such 'impure' women. Of course there are exceptions. This scene also presents another young *Begum* who gives the *tawaif* her due respect at least as a human being and protects Umrao from insult while this old servant and a senior *Begum* inconsiderately tag her as a "*Bazaar Aurat*" (prostitute/marketable woman). In *Devdas*, the supposed Bengali *Bhadralok* (Gentleman) Devdas Mukherjee, an Indian educated in Britain with ideals of dignity, morality and well-defined roles of women, declares to the *tawaif* Chandramukhi— "*Aurat maa hoti hai, behen hoti hai, patni hoti hai, dost hoti hai aur jab who kuchh nahi hoti tab woh tawaif hoti hai*" (A woman is a mother, sister, wife, a friend and when she is none of these, she is a *tawaif*/ prostitute; *translation mine*) and expresses his disgust and shame for this role of a woman. Here he echoes the British propaganda. In these films, the attitude of both of men and women towards the *tawaifs* constructs their social position and identity as outcasts. Also, constrictive gender roles for women

leave little scope for their respectability as humans and holistic progress. It is an accepted theory that one's identity is not just what one thinks of oneself but also how others perceive him/her. Over the span of time hardly any change seems to have occurred in the filmmakers' attitudes, they often deliberately dramatize scenes, use melodramatic dialogues to appeal to the emotions of the audiences, a hit film formula over years. Yet it can be argued that *Devdas* produces a counter discourse and presents a clear stand of not perpetuating any British propaganda through the hero who gradually sheds his British attire in the film and wears the Bengali *dhoti-kurta* and begins to respect Chandramukhi. He never views her as a commercial product to be enjoyed and exploited. He gradually shares his pain with the 'woman'-self of Chandramukhi lying beneath her social identity of a *tawaif*.

The ghettoization of the *tawaifs* to the *Chowk* where their *kotha* or brothel is located is what makes them a spatial construct. This aspect represented in the movies is based on the social discourse of the times when the film is written and in turn reinforces the discourse. A physical location, the 'marketplace' of the *tawaifs*, separate and isolated to a nook of the city forms just another world, an 'untouchable other' to the society of the gentry. This is due to the profession being labelled as prohibited, immoral and dishonourable; any liaison with them is considered shameful and deserves to be kept in the dark. It is ironical and hypocritical that these rich patrons sustain the *tawaif* class but also spew poison at them in public. Despite knowing that if once his name is tossed up and gossiped about in these *badnaam galliyaan* (infamous locations) of the prostitutes and the dance-girls, it will bring him immense dishonour, Nawab Sultan in *Umrao Jaan* or Nawab Zafar in *Pakeezah* can barely resist possessing Umrao and Sahib Jan respectively. The *kothas* portrayed in the movies are exceptionally lavish with royal looks. *Devdas* does not follow the model of Mughal court *tawaifs* but the *kotha* remains in a secluded part of the city. Chandramukhi has an idol of Lord Krishna in one of the rooms as he is cast in the mould of the *devdasi* culture. But none of the *tawaifs* in the movies remain restricted to their *kothas*. They are extremely mobile and all of them frequent the 'gentlemanly' mainstream society which has ghettoised them. Sahib Jan's mother Nargis was not accepted at Shahbuddin's home as his wife for she was a *tawaif*. Sahib Jan is not given refuge in Salim's home and when she walks on the streets a frenzied mob follows her, makes fun and vulgarly shouts, "*Tawaif hai, tawaif*" (even the English translation of the dialogue running simultaneously on screen reads "she's a whore") adding to her distress. It is only when she is married to Salim at the end that she gets entry into his 'home' and leaves her *kotha* life forever. But Sahib Jan also occupies other spaces like the train where she meets Salim twice and later his forest tent. Such places may be viewed as 'neutral spaces' where her *tawaif* identity doesn't oppress or isolate her. Umrao visits many palaces and places, finally reaches her native place Faizabad where she sings "*yeh*

kya jagah hai doston, yeh kaun sa dayaar hai” (What place is this friends, what region is this; *translation mine*). True, she can no longer recognize the place where she lived as a child and from where she was kidnapped for it is she, her life and identity that have changed. Here she faces the patriarch, her brother’s rebuke that she has shamed and dishonoured the family and must not return to shame them anymore, there is no place for her in their respectable ‘home’ (considered a sacred space). Thus it may be pertinently argued that the *tawaif* carries the social ghetto in her body and identity wherever she goes. For example, in the movie *Tawaif* when Dawood’s neighbour Nadira is missing, he at once suspects Sultana to have sold Nadira away for he thinks this is in the blood/nature of the *tawaif* class. Perhaps, if he had not known her to be a *tawaif*, he would not have stereotyped her so. This also amounts to a form of gender stereotyping by a patriarchal society.

I therefore argue that it is not so much the physical location of their *kothas* that can seclude them but the *tawaif* identity and body with all its art, her (false) consciousness of her social position, her past (history) which she constantly carries with her. She becomes the object of a spatial construct because it is in the other people’s perception and knowledge of her *tawaif*-hood that her ‘space’ and ‘place’ are determined. While she is cast out by some, sometimes she becomes the object of incredibly loyal love and respect of others. Foucault opines in *The History of Sexuality* (1978-86) that the body is the site on which discourses are enacted and contested (Mills 81), it is “constructed through discursive mediation” and “totally imprinted by history”, a “historically and culturally specific entity” and thus always subject to change (83). I argue that some filmmakers perhaps consciously present this dialectic between the mainstream society and the *tawaifs* to highlight their tragic social position on one hand but probably sometimes these become moments of resistance which is rather incomplete, for the basis of resistance often tends to be a greater ideological discourse of the filmmaker.

Devdas is unique in this context as it presents the director’s vision in the most entertainingly ‘Bollywood’ way. Chandramukhi is invited by Paro to attend the *Durga Puja* at her marital home and is introduced by Paro as her friend to her in-laws, there is free mixing between the ‘illicit’ and ‘licit’ worlds; the *tawaif* and the *thakurain* Paro dance together at the end of which Chandramukhi’s *tawaif* identity is revealed by another patriarch Kali Babu. But at the face of social abuse, she emerges a strong woman voicing how the men who wear the mask of respectability in society and spit at the *tawaif*, themselves visit her *kotha* at night to enjoy the *mehfils* and the women. She says that Goddess Durga’s idol is made with the clay of the *kotha* premises and this clay is not so weak, suggesting the inner strength of a *tawaif*-woman. The two sequences—Paro bringing clay from the *tawaifs*’ place for the Durga idol and the two women, one belonging to the home-space and the other from the socially outcast

world of *tawaifs*, coming together at Paro's home—seems a brilliantly conscious attempt on Bhansali's part. In an interview when Simi Garewal points out that *Devdas* has no erotic element, rather it is very romantic, Bhansali clearly states his vision:

I've dwelt more on the sensuality rather than the erotic . . .
I feel, the way I saw women in this film, I feel they were
images of Durga for me. I think a woman is all about power.
("Rendezvous with Simi Garewal", 15 Oct., 2012)

In light of this commendable effort of Bhansali to shift ideological boundaries and present something more rational and progressive, *Devdas* emerges as a major counter discourse to conventional ideologies regarding *tawaif* and their representation in the other three movies.

The construction of 'Power' to commodify the *tawaifs* takes place in the movies and this attests to their gendered position. Young girls like Umrao, whose childhood name was Amiran, are kidnapped and sold to the *kothas* where there is bidding and bargaining before they are 'bought'. They are trained well in dance, music, *ghazals* but the purpose is not to empower them to make them independent so that on growing up they can move out of the darkness to make a 'respectable' individual position in society. The only purpose is to equip them well so that they can please the rich male clients and earn ample to run the *kotha* business. Critics debate that the men constantly provide the *tawaif* with rich gifts and money and thus it is them who are deceived, looted and commodified at the *tawaif's* will. But it may be argued that it is the issue of consent that often makes the *tawaif* a commodity/victim at the hands of the *chaudhrayan* of the *kotha* and the male clients. Sometimes they are bound to perform or be available for providing sexual services without their own consent. Sahib Jan's situation on the boat with Nawab Zafar where he forces her to serve him is an example.

The *Chaudhrayan* is at the head of the *kotha*, an agent of patriarchy who runs the 'business' or 'institution' of *tawaifs*. *Umrao Jaan* presents this character in the persona of Khanum Jaan most vividly. Heartlessly mercantile, she is the cunning mistress behind the buying of young girls for her *kotha* and transforms them into minting machines. She trains them in dance, music, the art of seduction. She is an epitome of immense 'power' and appears to be a 'Panopticon' like figure, to use Foucault's concept of strict surveillance. But this surveillance is not for preserving a strong moral code. She watches over the most coveted *tawaifs* so that they do not get involved in an emotional relationship with any client nor engage in any sexual relation with a procurer-man who lives in the same *kotha*. She polices that the *tawaifs'* loveless sexuality, sexual performance and *mujra* is preserved for the high-paying clients who often demanded virgins. This is historically true also. "Typically a wealthy courtier, often the king himself began his direct association with a *kotha* by bidding for a virgin

whose patron he became, with the full privileges and obligations of that position.” He invited his friends and soirées to enjoy an exclusive sexual relationship with a *tawaif*” (Oldenburg 263). Gauhar Mirza (Naseeruddin Shah) is thrown out by Khanum Jan when the *Maulvi* catches him getting physically intimate with Umrao Jaan. Umrao, at the peak of her youth, full of desire and passion, deprived of love readily gets entangled in a passionate moment with Gauhar Mirza but it is probable that a sexual intercourse did not follow as the scene presents them to be immediately caught, however, it remains ambiguous. Gauhar Jan in *Pakeezah* is another such greedy and autocratic *kotha* head obliging Sahib Jan to offer herself to Nawaab Zafar against Sahib’s will. A more strikingly unique feature of *Devdas* is that the *kotha* culture is presented in the film very differently. The *kotha* women are always seen to share bonhomie. The *Chaudhrayan Baiji* (Apara Mehta) is a complete contrast to the brutal matriarchs of the other three movies. She comes across as a lovable mother-figure to the *tawaifs* of her *kotha*.

Sara Mills quotes Foucault from *Power / Knowledge*, “Power must be analysed as something that circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.” She analyses that for Foucault, Power is a net or system of relations spread throughout the society rather than simple set of relations between the oppressor and the oppressed (Mills 35). If the microcosm of the *tawaifs* is considered to be a separate society in itself and a *Chaudhrayan* (like Khanum Jaan or Gauhar Jan) an oppressive institution, then the network in which ‘Power’ circulates is made of all the other characters including the *tawaifs* themselves. Even Rahim Sheikh in *Tawaif* is at once a commodifier and controller of Sultana. He buys and resells her; while he’s in jail, he employs hired men for constant ‘surveillance’ outside Dawood’s house to prevent her from fleeing. Going by Foucault, if Power is understood as nothing passive to be held on to, rather something to be performed then Power and control may be understood as another construct of both, the external and internal society of the courtesans. Agencies like the *Maulvi* in the hierarchical system of the *kothas* restrict any attempt of transgression like that of Umrao and Gauhar Mirza which when found are vehemently curbed by immediate report to the *Chaudhrayan* and strictly punished. The whole system of which client will be attended by the *tawaif* and when, at whose service she will be put and at what price may be interpreted as a totally controlled mechanism in the hands of the Madam. This kind of ‘Panopticonism’ evidently constructs a strong discourse or a hegemonic space where these conditions of being ‘trapped’ in a helpless situation, social ‘victimisation’ are internalised as ‘normal’ by many *tawaifs* and circulates within them as a self-knowledge, of course discursive. Bibban, another courtesan in *Pakeezaah* tries to convince Sahib Jan that the letter she found in the train compartment which was from an unknown fellow-traveller praising her feet

adorned with *mehndi* and anklet (*payal*), asking her not to put her feet on the ground for then they will be dirty, is not meant for the *tawaif* Sahib Jan. Bibban tells her that the man apparently in love with Sahib Jan thinks her to be a 'normal' girl, doesn't know her *Tawaif* identity for he has seen her feet without the dancing bells. Thus 'individuals' like Bibban are important tools of constructing and 'performing' the Power of the *Chaudhrayan's* 'institution', perpetuating the '*tawaif* discourse' blinding every possibility of a rebellion and 'revolution'. Liminality exists in the *tawaifs* due to incomplete acceptance and incomplete transgression. In fact, sometimes the protagonist courtesans often seem to propagate this discourse of being 'victims' of fate, patriarchal commodities and the ethical discourse of their 'impurity' and 'untouchability'. Umrao sings, "*yeh mera dil kahe to kyaa, yeh khud se sharmsaar hai*" (What should my heart say? It is ashamed of itself; *translation mine*). It is in the *tawaif's* perception of her own self that the patriarchal 'Power' is reconstructed, reinforced and 'made normative'. Only Chandramukhi stands out in this context who is light spirited; rather than being immersed in self-pity and weeping at her fate, she appears light-hearted and fun-filled, yet emotionally charged. She seems to be the only silver lining, the redeemer of sanity, the midway between the sharp line of distinction between 'woman' and '*tawaif*'. This again shows the strong take of the filmmaker Bhansali and casts an oblique image of the new woman, simultaneously soft and rebellious.

The construction and conditioning of 'gender' and 'sexuality' of the *tawaifs* to make them more commercially viable is also portrayed. They're products of patriarchy within the microcosm of the *kotha*-society. Here the *kotha* life is most often oppression and tragedy to them. The scope for feminine bonding between *tawaifs* is quite there, some of the inmates of the *kotha* become supportive friends to each other like, Umrao and Bismillah, Sahib Jan and Bibban but it is not possible to say that it is not a gendered space. The very formation of a distinctive *tawaif* class and the imposition of all sorts of constructs of ethics and morality are based on this gender and sex distinction for it is in the illicit liaison or clandestine affair between 'man' and 'woman' that the whole culture runs. As the films portray, the very 'business' is based on beautiful women entertaining male clients and this requires a conspicuous gender construction of the 'female' erotic performer, be it her song, *mujra*, her ornamental dress-up or her sexual services. Judith Lynne Hanna states, ". . . dance often displays a person's sexual appeal, provides stimulating fantasy or foreplay, and communicates information as a prelude to encounters that lead to mating" (*Dance, Sex and Gender* 4). This is true in case of the *tawaif* protagonists, the songs they sing and the *mujra* they perform in the *mehfils* are loaded with sensual, erotic images and movements to attract the rich nobility present there. Umrao Jan sings "*Inn aankhon ki masti ke mastane hazaron hain . . . ek tumhi nahi tanha, ulfat mein mere ruswa*" (There are thousands intoxicated by the lust of these eyes, you are not the only one in love with me, disgraced;

translation mine). Sultana dances on “*Joban anmol baalma, lagale tu bhi mol baalma*” (My youth is precious sweetheart, you too bid for it; *translation mine*) inviting people like Rahim Sheikh to ‘buy’ her luscious youthfulness. Sahib Jan performs on “*Inhi logon ne leli na dupatta mera*” (It is these people who have snatched my veil; *translation mine*), the *dupatta* (scarf) being traditional cultural symbol of the preserver of a woman’s honour and when it is snatched by men it should mean dishonour, though for a *tawaif* it may be a usual phenomenon. In fact, the dance movements or choreography is highly expressive of the sensuality, passion, desire; use of hands and feet adorned with *mehndi* (Henna) and gorgeous jewellery and postures that highlight the face, swift and expressive kohl-eyes, parts of the female body, the pelvic movements, enacted words expressing passion all add to the sensuality that invite the men to be lost in lust but are graceful without any vulgarisation.

“Kinetic patterns evince . . . sexual behaviour . . . even when the shape of the body is obscured by costume, signs and symbols of sexuality may be read into the dance and erotic or lustful feeling aroused” (Hanna 5). Hanna clearly points out how in the cultural arena ‘sex role’ and ‘gender’ are constructed and conditioned. “Cultures add to nature’s distinctions and systematically attempt to teach one set of behaviour to females and another (usually opposite) set to males. Societies have specific ways—including dance, of sending messages of sexual identity, and showing us ways to discriminate ourselves as male or female” (7) The dances are full of *abhinay* or dramatic gestures. Close camera shots are used to shoot some movements and expressions so they have greater impact on the movie audience. The *tawaifs* are always found decking themselves up and putting on all ‘feminine’ charms to attract the men. This is inevitably construction of a gender. When Sahib Jan is in love with the stranger (Salim), she expresses her love and desire to meet her lover in “*Thade rahiyo o baanke yaar re . . . main toh kar aaun solah shringar re*” (Wait for me my handsome friend, I shall deck up and beautify myself and come to you; *translation mine*). Indian concept of beautification of a woman generally involves sixteen steps and the lyrics are so written that they describe how the *tawaif* wants to adorn her hair with *gajra* (flowers) and wear her bells, wishes to awaken all delicate graces before opening the doors for her man. This amounts to a construction of gender role/gender image to awaken sexual vigour. It might be argued that when Sahib Jan sings this, she actually addresses her unknown lover and this is a kind of self-assertion, an expression of the emotions and desires of a female which obliquely highlights her freedom. Yet this may not be considered a redeeming feature as for her perceiver, her clients, it is them she addresses, performs for and wishes to please with her beauty. Their ‘gaze’ (itself is a kind of ‘visual-sex’, as it may be called) arouses the desire to possess the ‘feminine object’. Hanna opines that besides being a sign of sexuality, dance is a stimulant and direct enactment; in this case dance develops erotic love or lust as the

sense of sight mediates the sense of touch (15). The constant sound of dancing bells ringing in the background in films like *Pakeezah*, creates the *mujra* atmosphere most effectively and resonates of dance as a motif. But in keeping with Chandramukhi's character, she is more rebellious in her dance and *abhinay* rather than encoding eroticism or coquetry. Chandramukhi tries to enchant Devdas, performs *kathak* on "Dhaai Shyam rok layi . . . aur chakmak mukh choom layi . . ." (Shyam/Lord Krishna stops me and kisses my face; *translation mine*). Through the song she expresses female desire for a man's love which is natural to a woman. Ironically, the aura of her *tawaif* identity only reminds one that such natural desires can only be objectified and commodified by the *tawaifs*, leading to the construction of a gendered space. The male-voice ad lip refers to thick hair fragrant with jasmine, face sparkling and a maddening gait, this is suggestive of the sensuality aroused in the male-gaze during the performances which strictly requires 'feminine' grace and attire on part of the *mujra* dancer. But the two songs allotted to her are very unique in essence and character from those of the other three films describing a typical *tawaif*-predicament.

Most of the directors of films are male creators and more importantly they are instrumental in creating the *tawaif* figures. The male directors' 'gaze' may be argued to be more questionable in films like *Umrao Jaan*, *Tawaif* and *Pakeezah* rather than in *Devdas*. This is because in the first three films, the predominant image of the *tawaif* figure is that of a passive victim and a highly sexualized object of male pleasure. It may be valid to argue that the male directors' 'gaze', to some extent, is conflated with that of those male characters in the films who view the *tawaifs* as hyper-sexualized passive objects. But in *Devdas*, Chandramukhi emerges as a radically different *tawaif* figure than those in the other films. The profundity of her love for Devdas (despite no hope of reciprocation), her devout spirituality, as well as her rebellious nature, her strong self-assertion and lack of self-pity keeps her far from becoming a typical *tawaif* and a puppet to the system to which she belongs. It becomes evident that the director's 'gaze' and in turn, the gaze of the audiences, is directed at the towering image of a fiercely individualistic woman who grows bigger than the system or the tropes/discourses attached to the *tawaif*'s body/identity. Mr. Bhansali's vision and Madhuri Dixit's acting prowess make this possible. The era of 'Bollywoodization' of Hindi cinema post 1990s saw the rise of 'stars' like Shah Rukh Khan and Madhuri Dixit. Dixit's charisma as a popular Bollywood star and the resultant 'star gazing' (by the viewers) have added to the enchantment and conviction with her character. In feminist terms, the 'female gaze' of the female audiences may, in this case, be considered a result of being enchanted by the image of a strong woman they admire or desire to become. This enchantment with an overpowering persona (rather than with a *tawaif*'s sexual appeal or typical victimization) can make the film an inspirational cultural product fostering a change in regressive social perspectives.

If 'Power' is in circulation, then transgression or resistance is another form of this circulating 'Power' exercised by the *tawaifs* and this is the redeeming feature in the films. Whether these events have been added as a conscious strategy to portray a resistance by *tawaifs* or to dramatize the movie and cast it into the time-tested formula of hero-heroine romance (heroine in distress and hero as a superhero who saves her) is debatable. Foucault foregrounds that individuals are not only recipients of Power but must be understood as the 'place' where Power is enacted and resisted. Power is productive, not just oppressing, curtailing freedom but bringing about forms of behaviour (Mills 36). Despite the *kotha* prohibitions, the *tawaifs* fall in love, they flee from the *kotha* to meet or marry their lovers. Sometimes unobliging, they appear individualistic and transgressive. At least, analysing and articulating or even thinking about one's position in life lays the seeds of resistance and autonomy. Their desire to learn more, refine their arts, their expression of the deepest feelings and sometimes overpowering the men by making them realize their weaknesses that bring them to the *kothas* to find repose or their cowardice in not accepting socially their love for the *tawaifs* may be read as aspects of resistance.

Even some modern male characters show transgressive attitudes. Salim abandons his family which doesn't accept a stray woman with no explained identity. Even after knowing Sahib Jan's *tawaif* identity he does not budge an inch from his love and respect for her. The immediate incorporation of the song "*Chalo dildaar chalo . . . chaand ke paar chalo*" (come sweetheart, let us go beyond the moon; *translation mine*) is significant as this may be read as an attempt by the lovers to transcend all worldly-social boundaries to where there shall be no social barrier to the love between two 'humans'. But when he takes her for marriage, the marriage presider asks her name, Salim names her 'Pakeezah' which means 'the pure one'. This very act stings Sahib Jan for she is filled with shame and guilt; she thinks she is undeserving of this name and the 'honour' of marriage as she is a defiled woman of the *kothas*, she abandons Salim and returns to her *kotha*. She articulates the discourse she lives in to Bibban, that in their world all of them are living corpses with only a body and no soul and that their marketplace is a graveyard. Again, she proves to be a patriarchal agent perpetuating the oppressive *tawaif* discourse. That this perennial imprisonment in the *tawaif* body and world is a mere construct is highlighted and undercut by the perspectives of a character like Salim. He is a forest officer, an embodiment of the advent of modernity into the old conservative society of feudal patriarchy, represents a professional new order, contrasting in attitudes to feudal patriarchs such as his father and grandfather (Morcom 2).

"Ratnabali Chatterjee asserts that colonial rule effectively created categories of the wife versus 'other' women outside the domestic sphere through 'an ideology of domesticity' which lead to an amalgamated class of prostitutes" (221). Marriage is

seen in the films as the 'saviour' of the *tawaifs* that can give them acceptance in mainstream society as 'women' denoting 'respectability'. Oldenburg gives historical evidence of marriage proving to be 'legal prostitution', the woman mistreated and deprived, given a meagre sum to run the household and used by the husband for sexual pleasures without considering her wish. "It is obvious that hegemonic relations are effectively perpetuated, and sexuality itself constructed through the process of differential socialization of women and men . . . the courtesans have logically 'constructed' lesbian existence as a legitimate alternative, just as much as Indian society at large constructs and enforces, through the institution of compulsory marriage, heterosexuality as 'normative' behaviour" (Oldenburg 282). But in case of the *tawaif* heroines in the movies, this level of realization of heterosexual marriage as a social discourse or construct is not there, this discourse of 'role of a woman' becomes so deeply rooted and internalised by them that marriage becomes their ardent desire and the only 'honourable' way of escape. Sultana in *Tawaif* desires to play the stereotyped role of a wife, she wants to be a typical wife who wears bangles and dresses up well, cooks and waits for her husband to come back from work. She voices a common discourse internalised as 'normal' and 'acceptable'. But this is just another 'role', no panacea that can give them complete autonomy. Though they transgress by getting seriously involved in love-relations with men and escaping to marry them but their rebellion and transgression is incomplete. They in turn, reiterate and reinforce the patriarchal values or discourses, affirm and legitimise the social constructs and fail to see themselves as independent, self-sufficient individual human beings. Their honour / respectable identity may not necessarily depend on the name of a man. It is hypocritical that when unmarried, her body is untouchable; there is no space for her in a respectable man's home but when married she suddenly becomes a 'clean' / 'honourable' woman. Her body and mind still have inscriptions of her past and that gives her an exclusive identity which a social custom (construct) like marriage can neither deny nor 'delete' permanently. Rather the exclusive identity needs to be celebrated for itself, it should not need any other kind of validation. Sahib Jan's last 'bloody' performance is symbolic of her ensuing marriage and loss of virginity on her husband's bed and at the same time an end to her identity as a dancer (Morcom 6). But the question arises as to whether this can be viewed as actually bringing autonomy/liberation to the women. People have only talked about their dehumanization but attempts to give them a human identity by shedding all inhibitions and discursive constructions have never been a practical initiative. Such a resolution of the story is reflective of the prevalent discourses in the then society and those of the writer/director's mind who do not challenge the time-tested hit formula of the lead pair finally getting married. Again, *Devdas* is an exception in this case.

Cultural media often tends to perpetuate these constrictive discourses. Film itself

proves an object of ideological construct where the hero must receive a virgin. It propagates marriage as the only way of 'respectable' 'human' survival for the *tawaif* protagonists. *Umrao Jaan* begins with the scene of ensuing marriage of little Amiran but before marriage she is kidnapped. The film seems to propagate the idealist constructs of purity and honour when Nawab Sultan is not allowed to marry Umrao for she is a *tawaif*. They do not follow this formula of victim and saviour. But still I'd argue that films like *Umrao Jaan* or even *Devdas* are slightly different with respect to the marriage construct. Umrao Jaan remains a *tawaif* at the end of the film, long after British invasion of the *kothas*, she comes back and sees herself in a dusty mirror and the scene freezes to end the movie. This may suggest that she can clearly see herself, her identity and position. She is alone but autonomous, she remains a *tawaif*, she is what she is. This is partly in keeping with the ideas of Muzaffar Ali who says that Film is a medium of expressing ideas comprehensively; it must give a message and be a voice against exploitation ("Interview of Film Director"). Had Ali not skipped Ruswa's ending where Umrao becomes a poet, perhaps the autonomy of the *tawaif* would be more complete.

Thus it may be argued that in the process of capturing the *tawaif* /culture and recreating, re-interpreting it for cinematic representation the *tawaif* becomes a product of many socio-cultural constructs—linguistic/semiotic, spatial, gender and sexuality, Power, marriage which are all tributaries of a greater construct, that is, ideology. Primarily, it is the ideological lens of the filmmaker who partly reflects the popular social ideologies regarding *tawaifs*. These women are subject to highly gendered treatments in society and this problematizes their individual identity formation. Yet within the corpus of portraying a similar subject, *Devdas* emerges as a counter discourse to or at least questions the other movies and is a potential initiation towards a more liberal and respectful perception of the *tawaifs* rather than merely stereotyping them. The process of deconstructing constructs runs the risk of multiplying many other constructs. It is a two-way traffic; change in the societal perception of *tawaif* may bring about a change in the cultural representation and vice-versa.

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Queer Resistance of the Heteronormative Family-Space in Rituparno Ghosh's Queer Trilogy

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Dominant discourses of “compulsory heterosexuality” which was necessarily a colonial import and modern construct in India, have institutionalised the concept of marriage and family with its holy trinity of husband, wife and child. Any other kind of amorous relation, beyond procreative heterosexuality is violently denigrated. Though ancient Indian society viewed same-sex love as perfectly compatible with procreative relation, and thereby expressed its faith on psychological bisexuality of every person, it was only after the arrival of the Empire that such a relation came to be viewed as “against the law of nature”. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai in their edited volume *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*, contend that “Indian society too entered a transitional phase as older indigenous discourses of same-sex love and romantic friendship came into dialogue with the new Western legal and medical discourses on homosexuality as an abnormality or an illness” (222). The British colonisers, in the pretext of their civilising mission, criminalised non-normative sex through section 377 of Indian Penal Code, stating that “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature of any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine” (qtd in Vanita 221). On the other hand, being continuously denigrated as sexually promiscuous and primitive, the colonised Indians engaged themselves in the defence mechanism of proving that India had no queer history and that homosexuality was a Western import. The homophobia and xenophobia affected the Indians to such a degree that the Indian reformers and nationalist leaders “tried to form an ideal Indian man, woman, child, and family, largely on the model of the British Victorian nuclear family. Monogamous heterosexual marriage came to be idealized as the only acceptable form of sexual coupling . . .” (Vanita 223).

In a heteronormative regime, family occupies such an important place not only because, the family offers love, care and security, but also because the family through procreation ensures the transmission of family wealth as well as the heteronormative values which the child, in a cyclic process, will uphold and perpetuate. Hence, the non-normative sex which does not lead to reproduction and consequently avoids the burden of the perpetuation of heteronormativity is severely castrated. In the late capitalist society, however, the concept of family is simultaneously celebrated and denigrated.

While the neo-liberal atmosphere of the late capitalist society has propelled the emergence of gay, lesbian and queer people beyond the heteronormative family-space, it has also not refused the importance of a heterosexual family for providing economic and emotional succour. Eng writes:

If the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the significant emergence of gay identity and visibility as a function of the free market, along with the development of a political movement for rights and recognition (especially in relation to the AIDS pandemic), it also marked the simultaneous consolidation of Right-wing ideologies under the sign of “family” and “family values”. (40-41)

Now it becomes very difficult for a queer individual to sustain in this confusing scenario. He can neither belong to a heteronormative family-space where procreation is the ultimate truth nor can he ignore the rights and privileges which a family entails. Hence a redefinition of ‘family’ beyond its holy trinity of husband, wife and child and a reclamation of family-space beyond heteronormative family values, is necessitated. In his queer trilogy *Arekti Premer Golpo*, *Memories in March* and *Chitrangada* as well as in many other supposedly non-queer films, Ghosh either strongly criticises the heteronormative family values which jeopardise the lives of the gendered and sexual subalterns or rejects social institutions of marriage and family altogether for their normative mandates. However, it must be mentioned, though these three films are widely regarded as Ghosh’s queer trilogy, for the dominant presence of his queer aesthetics in them, Ghosh has directed only *Chitrangada*, and he was the production designer and creative director of *Arekti Premer Golpo* and the story writer and lyricist of *Memories in March*, while he has acted in all of them.

The primary setback the queer children suffer is within the family of their heterosexual parents. The parents’ heteronormative prejudice makes it much difficult for the queer children to express themselves. They are either treated to become “normal” or put to the closet. Ghosh speaks for an alternative family space beyond the hegemonic presence of hetero-patriarchy. Rudra’s parents in *Chitrangada* want him to get treated for his “abnormality”. They force him to uphold the heteronormative family values through marriage and procreation. Especially, the masculine father who confuses naturalness with normativity, does not find any fault in asking their son to be masculine as he thinks, it’s quite natural for a son to behave like a son. However, disappointing his normative parents, Rudra embarks on gender reassignment surgery which though he postpones later. Rudra’s queer self ultimately compels his parents to shake off their rigid normativity and accept him as he is. In *Memories in March*, the mother can’t accept her son’s homosexuality when she first comes across the revelation. She accuses herself and regrets for not taking her son to her psychiatrist friends to get

him treated to become “normal”. Ornob severely chastises her and later mocks her for this attitude. Ornob expresses his pessimistic doubt over how Arti’s prejudiced heteronormativity could cause a detrimental blow to his relation with Siddharth, if the latter had been alive. Ornob’s dominant queer presence gradually convinces Arti to come to terms with the naturalness of queer subjectivity. She sympathises with Ornob in whom she finds her son; celebrates his birthday together and in her letter to him, she confesses her being enlightened and enriched with “better” and “larger” ideas about her son and thereby of course about human subjectivity and relation. In *Arekhi Premer Galpo*, too, Ghosh critiques the normative family values which not only take hostage the lives of the queer individuals like Chapal and Abhiroop, but also wreaks havoc on the lives of the bisexual people like Kumar and Basu. It is also Ghosh’s intention to obliquely refer to the condition of women in a heteronormative family, who are compelled to show allegiance to this institution, in spite of feeling betrayed and neglected. In *Arekhi Premer Galpo*, Gopa is compelled to suffer her husband’s sexual promiscuity for her physical illness, while Rani, though feels betrayed, doesn’t afford to leave Basu, especially after being pregnant, for in a heteronormative family, a child’s identity largely depends on the father. Strongly criticising the normative family values, Ghosh speaks for an alternative family space beyond the hegemonic presence of heteronormativity.

While the queer protagonists find it difficult to accommodate themselves in the heteronormative family structure, yet an aspiration for belonging to a non-normative family is felt and expressed. In *Chitrangada*, initially a heteronormative fantasy for a family is expressed by both Rudra and Partho, only to be disillusioned at the end. Though, from the very beginning of the film, Rudra as well as Partho violate the heteronormative construction of gender and sexuality, initially their idea of a family is deeply embedded in the discourses of heteronormativity. Just like any heterosexual couple, the relation between Rudra and Partho is affected by the binary conception of gender. Rudra is supposed to be the feminine, though a strong and independent one, in contrast to Partho who is the masculine man in their coupledness. Though Rudra is a masculine name as it refers to the mightiest god Lord Shiva of Hinduism, Partho fondly calls him Rudie, a more feminine address. Partho sometimes even caresses him as a baby. Partho desires for a family of their own and proposes Rudra to buy the house beside the beach to live together for ever. Rudra promptly comments that to make it happen, first he has to find out a Madan - the god who transformed Chitrangada from *kurupa* to *surupa* in the *Mahabharata* - to change himself into a woman. Rudra, though joking, but is being inevitably heteronormative in his thought as he cannot assume of a family beyond a man-woman relationship. After a few days when Mala visits Rudra with her little children, Partho exposes and expresses his love for children. The coming of Mala’s children in their little flat motivate their latent love for a child so

deeply that they seriously start thinking of their own family with a child. Now, the figure of the child holds the central position and Rudra immediately decides to change his sex to become a woman and adopt a child. But when Rudra has already undergone the breast implantation surgery, the bourgeois masculinity of Partho deters him from accepting Rudra as a woman proper. Rather for his own true family Partho desires a “real woman” who can give birth to his own child, instead of adopting one. He decides to marry Kasturi who in a short while gets impregnated. Things get complicated as disregarding Partho’s wish, Kasturi wants an abortion, since her sole aim is to become a dancer and she thinks the child would affect her career. Partho breaks down at this, comes back to Rudra for economic as well as emotional support. Though Rudra helps him with some money, he doesn’t provide him with any emotional succour. Partho as well as Rudra become disillusioned of their heteronormative fantasy of accommodating themselves in the heteronormative family structure in terms of the “reproductive futurity”. So when his ex-boyfriend Joe proposes Rudra to stay together, he refuses. At the end of the narrative when Rudra has already reversed his decision of becoming a woman and lost all hope of a family, his love does not die. At the operation table, when the doctor asks him to remember any phone number, he remembers and utters Partho’s number in his trance. When Partho is called over the phone, he is travelling in a train, moving elsewhere and cannot be properly connected due to the network failure. This symbolically creates the sense of an impossibility of the consummation of a queer relation through marriage or family as happens in a heteronormative love relation. Finally, though Rudra goes back to his parents, but with no aspiration to consummate the ideals of reproductive heteronormativity which extends property relation along with its culture. He refuses to sign the court paper which his father has brought to transfer his property to him. He does not aspire for assimilation in the heteronormative family structure, since, as

In *Aarekti Premer Golpo*, Ghosh painstakingly portrays Bhaduri’s unrequited dream of having a family of his own with his admirers like Kumar Babu and Tushar. Kumar Babu, though has a family of his own, loves Chapal and spends time with him just like a spouse, dumping his own wife. Chapal though knows about Kumar’s wife and children, has always harboured the dream of living with Kumar as his partner. He even once asked Kumar to put him an iron band in his hand to let others know that he is married, just as a husband puts in the bride’s hand as a sign of marriage in Hindu culture. But as Kumar starts avoiding him, he leaves for Tarapith, a Hindu pilgrimage and there he meets Tushar, a young guy and the manager of an *ashram*. Tushar also has left his parental home refusing to be caged in a heterosexual family structure, to get married and produce children. However, Tushar’s non-normative self gets attracted to Chapal and they spend four years together. Tushar’s refusal to be stuck to the heteronormative family structure and his simultaneous attraction towards Chapal, voices

for the necessity of non-normative family space to be harboured by the people like him. While Chapal also supposes to have found someone who really loves him and with whom he desires to satisfy his dream of establishing a family, their dream is thwarted as Kumar comes back. This loss of hope, only reiterates the impossibility of such a dream in a heteronormative society. Kumar comes back in search of him, to take him back to look after his family as his wife has fallen seriously ill. Kumar even incites Chapal's suppressed dream of living together and asks Chapal "Did I ever tell you that my home was not yours too?" But Chapal doubts his false promise of providing him with a family and asks him if he had ever thought of him in these four years. However, Kumar insists him in such a way that Chapal can't refuse him in his misfortune, in spite of his unwillingness. Tushar's dream of a family is thwarted with Chapal's faint hope of a new family. But his stay with Kumar's family in Bhawanipur, turns to be an exile than a loving family-space as he had hoped. When Chapal remembers to Momo how he looked after the entire family, nursed his sick wife, looked after the children, mopped the entire house, washed clothes and so on, Momo concludes, "So you were the lady of the house". But disappointing her Chapal rues, "At first I thought I was the lady. Then I saw I was a free domestic help". Things worsened when Kumar brought home a promiscuous actress Sheila. Thus, Chapal's repeated attempt to create a family of his own remains unfulfilled. Along with Chapal's thwarted dream, the film parallelly exposes Abhiroop's inability to make a lasting relation with Basu. Though both of them love each other, but they enjoy their company only when they are away from Rani, Basu's wife. Basu even is afraid of the moral policing which becomes evident in his comment "Imagine us like a couple on the run. ...Policing chasing us". In spite of his fear, Basu continues to play the balancing act until his wife Rani physically arrives in the scene. She comes with the news of their expectant baby. When Rani divulges the news of the baby to Basu at the presence of Abhiroop, it really upsets Abhi not only because it makes Basu more inclined to his wife, but also because he feels like an outsider in this heteronormative structure of the family with the holy trinity of husband, wife and the child. He calls his mother immediately after that as he feels alone. Later when Basu calls Abhi at night and reads out a poem which he has composed about his pregnant wife and their prospective baby, and asks for his approval, Abhi realises Basu's attempt to allay the anguish which Abhi has been undergoing. But this hurts Abhi more as he says Basu, "While you were reading out the poem, you know what I was actually seeing? Baby nappies, diapers, lactogen. It's not my scene Basu. I'm sorry. ...I've been an outsider to this all my life and just want to stay like that. You know, actually this morning I realised how different we actually are like from two different planets almost". The figure of the child once more appears as the stumbling block magnifying the difference between them. Coming to the hotel, Rani rediscovers the intimacy between Basu and Abhiroop and though she feels betrayed, she can't leave Basu for the prospective baby. As she informs Abhiroop,

she has often thought of leaving Basu, leave him to be with Abhiroop, “But now with this new development, I don’t think I can let him go. I can’t afford to let him go Abhiroop. Not any more”. In spite of their pain of separation Basu and Abhi have to leave each other, for each of them has realised their limitation in the heteronormative environment where they live. Abhirrop can never offer the family of holy trinity, by which Basu’s identity is constructed and defined and on the other hand, it is not also possible for Basu to continue with the balancing act for ever. While on the one hand, the film ends with the sad note of separation between the queer lovers, on the other hand, the drum beats and the wishing of puja greetings heralds a mood of festivity. Hence the dream of a queer family is sacrificed to that of the hegemonic heteronormative one which is celebrated through the trope of the festival of goddess Durga. The advent of goddess Durga with all her children functions as the significant cultural symbol of a heteronormative family.

In *Memories in March*, neither the homosexual relation between Ornob and Siddharth nor the heterosexual relation between Siddharth’s parents can successfully belong to a family-space. While on the one hand, the relation between Ornob and Siddharth does not get consummated as death comes in between them and snatches Siddharth away from Ornob, on the other hand the heteronormative relation between Siddharth’s parents remain ever hyphenated. The holy trinity can’t coalesce together as the husband and wife get separated from each other and the child grows up to be a homosexual, causing a disruption in the perpetuation of heteronormativity through procreation. The sense of failure haunts the film, as Siddharth can’t communicate the message of his homosexual relation to his mother Arti who on the other hand can’t make a contact with her husband to impart the news of Siddharth’s death, in spite of her repeated attempt. At the end of the film, when Siddharth’s father calls back Arti has already left the place.

The critique and resistance of heteronormative family values, not necessarily speaks for an inclusion or assimilation of the queer individuals within the family space, since as Sarah Ahmed puts it, “Assimilation involves a desire to approximate an ideal one has already failed; an identification with one’s designation as a failed subject. A choice of assimilation - queer skin, straight masks - is clearly about supporting the violence of heteronormative distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate lives” (Ahmed 150). Lee Edelman in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, argues that the queer resistance to heteronormativity lies not in the fight for inclusion, for the rights to marry, to adopt, but in the rejection of the “reproductive futurism”. A heteronormative society puts a great emphasis on “reproductive futurity” which is expressed through the figure of the child who would ultimately secure the discourses of heteronormativity. This emphasis on the figure of the child is problematic as it disregards those who do not produce children or who do not want to define

themselves against any stable future. “Reproductive futurity” find the ultimate meaning of life in the child rearing and so people who do not produce children are supposed to have no future. To get rid of “the cultural burden of signifying futurity”, Edelman calls for a queer negativity, the “death drive”. Psychoanalytically speaking, the “death drive” is the desire to disrupt all those efforts which try to fix a singular stable meaning to life.

In his queer trilogy Ghosh portrays failure as a dominant motif. The queer protagonists fail to set up a family as their love is never consummated. To a queer artist like Ghosh, failure offers an opportunity not only to critique the heteronormative logic of success, but also celebrate in a camp fashion the dark negative world of queer failure. While the failure saves the queer protagonists from the hegemonic burden of appropriating the heteronormative logic of sociality, family, reproduction, wealth accumulation and consumption, it also helps them enjoy, the *jouissance* of queer failure. Even though queer failure sometimes entails despair and pain, but that too contains a bright prospect of questioning the cultural logic of heteronormativity. Judith Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure* observes:

Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life (3).

Heteronormative society measures success in terms of “reproductive futurity” and wealth accumulation and dismisses homosexuality for not being able to actualise the relation between production and reproduction. “Capitalist logic casts the homosexual as inauthentic and unreal, as incapable of proper love and unable to make the appropriate connections between sociality, relationality, family, sex, desire, and consumption” (Halberstam 95). Hence queer failure to validate the heteronormative logic of production and reproduction turns to be a way of life, a style in opposition to the heteronormative notion of success. On the other hand, for some critics like José Muñoz, the failure creates a hope for a queer utopia. He thinks, the failure propels us to work for a better future, beyond the toiling of the present. According to him, “QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here. Queerness is an ideality. . . . We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. . . . The future is queerness’s domain” (1). Critiquing “ontological certitude”, Muñoz associates failure

with queerness in the hope of a utopian future which of course remains ever elusive. In Ghosh's queer trilogy, the non-normative individuals like Chapal, Abhiroop, Ornob, Siddharth or Rudra belong to the queer planet where the sense of belonging to a family always remains elusive and never reached.

However, though it cannot be certainly said whether Ghosh dreamt of a queer utopia, but Ghosh's resistance of the heteronormative family-space is obvious. At the end of each film, the normative prejudices of the parental figures ultimately give way to the non-normative naturalness of their queer children. The aspiration and the ultimate failure not only underscore the impossibility of a queer-family against the hegemonic presence of compulsory heterosexuality, but also question the validity of the grand narrative of heteronormativity itself. Their failure actually ends up queerise the heteronormative family-space altogether, providing an opportunity to enjoy the jouissance of the instability of life, in the breakdown of a singular meaning in terms of a stable future.

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Interrogating Patriarchy - A Look into Rituparna Ghosh's *Dahan* and *Antarmahal*

Trisita Ganguly

Rituparno Ghosh follows the legacy of Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal, Aparna Sen in creating art house films, many of which revolve round the complexities of relationships, gendered desires and the intricacies of emotion. Ghosh prefers to play with the changing perspectives of the 'Gendered Identity' by intervening sanitized spaces of the middle class home with narratives of sexual desires, thereby debunking prevailing notions of compulsory traditional forms of sexuality. He vociferously challenges the accepted dynamics of power equations between men and women, parent and children, between the heterosexual and the queer people. Ghosh's films are a critique of the norms that have been functioning unquestioned in society, especially in the context of the middle class home and of the torment of dilemmas of being modern and often being stuck in tradition.

Ghosh's films made a mark in launching a critique of the hetero patriarchy often exposing the reality behind the so called happy marriages, romantic relationships and familial equations. Though the films are embedded in the local Bengali culture, the narratives, the agony, the desires, the human relationships, the treatment meted to these films is highly global. As Sayandeb Chowdhury writes -

Ghosh managed to start a new dialogue with the urban middle class, a segment that was itself consistently on the increase throughout the first decade of liberalization. Ghosh's greatest joy was to throw a group of middle and upper middle-class characters into a tightly-controlled domestic ecosystem in which they were tested, tensions would mount, passions would play their turn and the possibilities of melodrama were to be fully realised." (Qtd. in *The world of Rituparno Ghosh: Texts, Contexts and Transgressions*, n.p.)

Ghosh's films were widely acclaimed for their transgressiveness and challenging narratives. His stories explored such transgressive social codes as incest in *Utsav* (*Festival*), marital rape in *Dahan* (*Crossfire*), polyandry in *Shubho Muharat* (*First Shot*), the repressed sexual desire in *Chokher Bali* (*A Passion Play*), same-sex love in *Chitrangada: A Crowning Wish* and the moral hypocrisies of the new middle

class in *Dosar (Emotional Companion)*. Always censured on the ground of his non-conformist gender and sexual orientation, Ghosh has constantly attempted to expose the sham progressiveness of his immediate society which remains insensitive to human emotions and desires to maintain the false conservatism. His female characters are no longer concerned with material freedom. Instead they struggle to realise their physical emotional needs which have so long been neglected in the patriarchal structure of the society and they strive in their own way to subvert the norms to value their needs.

In *Dahan (Crossfire)*, based on Suchitra Bhattacharya's novel of the same name, Romita Chowdhury, a newly married middle class young woman, spends hours standing on the balcony of her conjugal home. As the film progresses, however, it is this limit space of the balcony – poised precariously between the inside and the outside, the public and the private, freedom and confinement – that becomes one of the points of contention in the domestic strife between Romita and her husband Palash. Their arranged marriage ensures that they are unknown to each other. An incident suddenly shakes up the easy flow and quiet rhythm of their post marital romance and brings out the aridity of their conjugal understanding. Palash and Romita are returning from a shopping trip to city centre and are caught without transport outside the metro station in an evening shower. While Palash is across the road to buy cigarette, a gang of teasers start harassing Romita and molest her. When Palash came on the scene, they beat him up, and took Romita away. Jhinuk, a young unmarried teacher who is passing in an auto rickshaw, rescues Romita when the goons are on the point of abducting her on their motorcycle. Jhinuk persuades the couple to lodge a complaint. This event – which many characters in the film refer to as an 'accident' at different points of time – irrevocably ties together the lives of two women unknown to each other for the next few months to come. She is then glorified for her unprecedented bravery and comes on the front page of the newspaper. But for Romita things unfolded differently. The pressure on her builds as issues of family prestige and the scandal of a housewife having been molested by several men seem to drive out the initial sympathy that her husband and in-laws feel about her plight. Even Palash is assailed by the question of his colleagues about whether his wife had a previous affair which may be one of the causes of her assault. The first rush of celebratory support from Jhinuk's family also begins to wear thin as the legal hassles in seeing the case through slowly manifest themselves. Her boyfriend Tunir whom she is slated to marry urges her not to appear before court on the plea that it would disturb their marriage and conjugal happiness. He also reminds Jhinuk that his foreign posting depends on she is implicated in the case. Trina Nileena Banejee has stated in her 'The Impossible Collective: A Review of Rituparno Ghosh's *Dahan*' -

Both Romita and Jhinuk find, in their separate ways that the illusions on which their moral-ethical world had rested as

well as the truth of their personal relationships have begun to slowly fall apart. They grope desperately for something to hold on to, some sense of empathy and solidarity in a world which has begun to seem increasingly alien to them. (Banerjee, n.p.)

Romita stands sleepless night on her balcony defying Plash's allegation that this is simply another attempt to draw sexual attention on her. Jhinuk too finding increasing alienated in her own household seeks solace in another limit space – the old age home where her aging grandmother lives. She feels inclined to distance herself from the quotidian pettiness of middle-class life. Trina Nileena Banejee writes "As the film progresses, the distribution of safe and unsafe spaces between the private and the public grows steadily more confusing – the middle-class home no longer is a space of belonging, but rather a network of power relationships where hierarchies manifest themselves as emotional manipulations as well as direct physical/sexual violence". (n.p.) Romita's in-laws forbid her to identify the accused but swimming in the background of her almost-silent testimony is another case of violence that never gets registered – the brutal rape by her husband inside the space of her bedroom.

Both women, at the end of the film, seem to find a modicum of freedom by being on the road. Romita decides to go to her sister in Canada in the hopes of better future. She denies formal divorce perhaps having realised the limitations of legality to give freedom and dignity to a woman in a world where she continues to remain infantilised, ostracised, silenced by the very relationships that she holds dearest. Jhinuk finally agrees to marry Tunir inspite of her utter disillusionment, her loss of respect and trust.

But she decided to keep her habit of walking alone because even blind trust may cheat us sometimes, as she said "Motorbike o to kokhono kharap hote pare (Even motorbike may be out of order) . Romita's voice reads from her letter, as Jhinuk walks out alone from the old age home: 'We are all inevitably alone. Then why disturb these relationships as they are? Let them be. Perhaps it is enough not to depend on them any longer.'

Everything would stay quiet normal if they accepted the patriarchal code of conduct uncontrovertibly .But as soon as they questioned , they have become alien ,other and are driven towards uncertain future. They are ready to step toward uncertainty, and enjoy the taste of solidarity but they can't stand the oppressive glance anymore. It doesn't matter whether their husband is staying with them or not because they are no more bound by patriarchy which deforms a human being into a creature of flesh and blood.

In the next film *Antarmahal* Ghosh unravels decadent feudal world, its leisurely extravaganza, and the sordid state of its inner chambers, inhabited by women treated as childbearing machines for perpetuating the bloodline. *Antarmahal* makes an inroad

into these hidden chambers to reveal the brutality women suffer if they fail to bear male offspring. Revolving around an impotent zamindar's incessant endeavours to bring forth a son, the rightful heir to his throne, the film completely dismantles the romance generally associated with sex to reveal the crudity of the act. Violence of sexual intercourse without any touch of emotion is discerned from the very outset. Set in the colonial era of 1878, the film is about Bhubaneswar, a wealthy yet grotesque man who has an obsessive desire for an heir and a greedy lust for power. Having been unsuccessful in fathering a child with his first wife, Mahamaya, he marries a younger and more vulnerable girl named Jashomoti. He is least bothered about her desires, wishes, emotions and agony. Having still failed to make Jasomati pregnant, Bhubaneswar enlists the help of a Brahmin priest who is ordered to sit in the bedroom chanting mantras during the act of sex itself because Bhubaneswar believes it will initiate the chances of fertilization. Though Jashomoti is extremely uncomfortable about it, Jamindar forces her to have sex with him. On the other side the previous wife, called as Boro Bou, being elder both in age and experience, knows her husband's impotency but at the same time feels remorse to see her husband with new wife. In an act of defiance against this Mahamaya sneaks into the bedroom and, sitting in front of the priest, she starts to titillate him. Lifting up her saree, smiling attractively, she was trying to distract the Brahmin's attention. Just as Binodini and Urmila do a type of bodywork in negotiating social values, Mahamaya strategically uses her body and sari in a sexualised manner that ridicules and undermines the domination and exploitation of Jasomati by Bhubaneswar. What is remarkable is that despite their incarcerated lives under the constant gaze of repressive patriarchy, these two women dare to feel attracted to other men. Mahamaya went to attract the attention of patua Brij Bhusan to be impregnated by him as she knew about her husband's impotency. This may seem unsettling to many as they went against the belief that women should be sexual object with no desires of their own. Her sexual transgression is punished by five high born Brahmins by forcing her to sleep with them.

Natun Bou falls in love with a lower caste Patua- a love which she has never experienced before. For the first time she is enjoying the presence of a man inside her room while her husband's presence is scary and terrifying just as the presence of her husband's cat who is upsetting her all the time. But her love takes away her life. Jamindar's crave for title leads him to make the idol of Devi Durga after the face of Queen Victoria. But when the idol is found to have likeness with Natun Bou's face, everything goes unsettling and this leads to her final act of suicide which underscores the impossibility of successfully sustaining a desire that disrupts normative codes. For, even being desired by a man, other than the husband, is blemish on the woman's character.

These two women are trapped in the palatial house with signs of patriarchy very

evident everywhere, starting with the huge paintings of the family's forefathers hanging along the corridor, 'as if they are observing the women'. Their only job is to give birth to a male heir and those who 'fail' to do so have to bear with all possible oppression and injustice. In Indian society men get married just to keep up his lineage. We see in 'Jamai Barik' by Dinbondhu Mitro that the males were called upon the inner chamber only at night, not at other times. Gulam Murshid observes "In that dark house they met together, had sexual intercourse, produced babies year to year but this environment was not ideal for love, obviously not" (Qtd. in *Mediterranean Journal* 2067). In this unfavourable ambience extra – marital affairs were bred up. This didn't happen in terms of unmarried girls, but adultery took place in case of other married women or widows. "As a result, the experts wanted to say that "The love that was prevalent in this society was adultery" (Khan 2067). In the same way we see the dominance of male body over female ones in the film of *Antar Mahal*. Adultery emanates from the suppressed desires of love. Jamindar has conquered Yashomoti's body but not her heart which is owned by Brij Bhusan. He keeps her request for making doll, which is never given importance by her husband. In an emotionally frenzied state she comes to his arms and feels the warmth of peace.

Body is, as in *Chokher Bali*, a destabilizing force. The elder wife herself uses her body to distract the priest when he is chanting Sanskrit verses while Thakur and Yashomati copulate and this is a sharp sexual oppression which Yashomoti suffers. She went to approach the young Patua sexually to blot out the false allegation against her impotency.

Rituparno uses the sexual component in these two films not as titillation, but to expose the means of the brutal oppression on female body which deadens the spirit to fight. But withstanding all those assaults they carry on their battle to assert their right to their body and mind and Rituparno films tend to leave a note hope.

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Rejuvenation and Gender Issues in Bengali and English Popular Fiction

Prodosh Bhattacharya

Introduction

This paper considers gender issues in two texts, both belonging to genre-fiction. The first is a Bengali detective story, the solution to the mystery lying in the realm of science-fiction. The second is an earlier work by an English novelist which, while talking about ‘modern science’ and ‘dangerous experiments’, involves more of the occult.

‘The Glass Coffin’¹

‘The Glass Coffin’ (‘কাঁচের কফিন’) is a novella by Hemendra Kumar Roy (1888-1963), a multi-faceted Bengali litterateur, best-known for his pioneering work in genre-fiction for children.

The Narrative Summarized

Sundar-babu, an Inspector under Kolkata Police, comes to his private detective friend Jayanta with the case of a wealthy grandmother, Sushila Sundari Debi, and a zamindar Gobinda Lal Roy, both of whom have disappeared after having withdrawn Rupees Fifteen lakhs and Rupees Twelve lakhs respectively from their banks. Both are linked with a renowned physicist-cum-physician called Dr Manohar Mitra. Jayanta tracks the doctor to a small town called Sultanpur where Dr Mitra is living under the alias of Siddheshwar Sen. The local bank manager, Karuna Bhattacharya, who turns out to be Manik’s childhood friend, acknowledges that about eighteen months ago ‘Siddheshwar Sen’ had alighted at the local station with a very old lady, who was followed a few days later by a similarly old gentleman. Karuna also confirms that the amounts corresponding to those withdrawn by the two old persons were indeed deposited in the bank he manages. He also repeats the rumour about Sen’s bungalow that in it there are two glass coffins, each housing a body, of a man and of a woman.

Finally, ‘Siddheshwar Sen’, i.e., Dr Manohar Mitra, is chased by the team to his bungalow. Sundar-babu accuses Dr Mitra of having robbed two old people, then having murdered them, and finally having enclosed their bodies in glass coffins. Dr Mitra flatly denies the existence of any coffin in his house. He asks Sundar-babu to choose which of the two alleged victims he wants to see first. Sundar-babu chooses Sushila

Debi. Dr Mitra's call to her is answered from within the house 'with a voice like music', and the person who enters the room is described as 'amazingly beautiful and majestic' (177). A dumbfounded Jayanta asks whether she is indeed Sushila Debi, to which Dr Mitra replies that henceforth she will be called by the new name of 'Lalita' (*ibid.*) Sundar-babu refuses to acknowledge that the woman is the original seventy-five-year-old Sushila Debi. When Dr Mitra asks him whether an old woman may not once again become young, he replies that old age is followed by death, not by youth. So, Dr Mitra should either say something Sundar-babu finds believable or accompany the latter to the police station.

At this point, Dr Mitra once again addresses Sushila by her original name, prefixing it with the Bengali word 'মা' which literally means 'mother', but which is used as a prefix to denote affection on the part of those who assume a paternal position vis-à-vis younger women who may not be their biological daughters. He instructs Sushila to go in and prepare tea and refreshments for the 'guests'. Jayanta now asks Dr Mitra how the lady is to be addressed. It is important to note that Dr Mitra responds by instructing Jayanta to ask the lady herself. In the same dulcet voice she replies that to her 'father', Dr Mitra, she is 'Sushila'. However, the guests have never seen the geriatric Sushila, so they should address her by her new name 'Lalita'. The object of the scientific experiment not only allowed the experiment and financed it, but now also embraces her new identity which is a product of that experiment.

Later, Dr Mitra justifies all the deliberate mystery he has created around the two people, including the departure from Kolkata to the obscure Sultanpur. He says, neither of them can now return to his or her respective homes, which is why he has rechristened SushilaLalita. None of her own people would be able to recognize her in her rejuvenated body. Further, should she attempt to regain her earlier position in her family, the result would be litigation. Hence, both Sushila Debi and Mr Gobinda Lal Roy had decided that, in the event of the attempt at rejuvenation succeeding, they would lead new lives under new names. The narrative concludes with 'Lalita Debi' producing, in the middle of the nowhere that is Sultanpur, sandwiches, 'sheek kababs', bread and butter, tea, and sweets (182)! Some might consider this a demonstration of 'gender-appropriateness', the 'daughter' of the household displaying her culinary talents to 'guests' on the instruction of her 'father'. To an amazed Manik's query whether the kababs are made of tiger meat, she replies that he has to taste them to find out (*ibid.*).

Gender Issues in 'The Glass-Coffin'

Although both a man and a woman opt for rejuvenation to start with, the narrative chooses to focus on the woman. The impression, call it illusion, left as a result is that a geriatric woman has chosen to become young again, and has financed the scientific

experiment to give effect to that choice. Having achieved her goal, she is given the choice to resume her original name or to adopt the one given by her mentor. She consciously adopts him as her (foster) father and chooses to be identified by the name he has given her.

The reason for Roy's choice to construct his narrative by focussing on her becomes clear once we turn to the other object of Dr Mitra's exercise in rejuvenation, the male, Gobinda Lal Roy, as also to the 'glass coffin' of the title. Prior to explaining that, it is necessary to look at the process adopted by Dr Mitra to rejuvenate the two geriatrics. Dr Mitra's theory is that it is the accumulation of radium in the human body that causes senility which accompanies aging. He first expels all harmful radium atoms from the body through a diet of vinegar and appropriate acids which have valence. Normal diet is then reintroduced, containing radium-free calcium. Another session of acidic diet follows, and then, normal diet. The treatment continues over months.

Dr Mitra now takes them to see the rejuvenated Gobinda Lal Roy. They see what seems like an exquisitely beautiful piece of sculpture by a Greek artist. It is actually a very young, almost boy-like, well-built, fair, naked body, which is enclosed in what seems to be glass, the glass-like substance being inseparable from the body. When Sundar-babu asks whether it is a wax statue or a corpse in the 'glass coffin', Dr Mitra points out that the body is alive, as proved by its complexion, and the fact that its eyelids are trembling from time to time. He explains that he has not created this glassy substance. After the calcium diet, once treatment is resumed, the 'patient', as Dr Mitra puts it, suddenly falls into a long and deep slumber, during which the whole body is enveloped by the glass-covering. Sometime later, the patient wakes, the glass-covering cracks, and the human being sits up, alive. Dr Mitra has no explanation for it! The amazed Sundar-babu calls the spectacle that of a 'human cocoon' (182).²

Roy had the opportunity of showing us *both* naked bodies. No doubt people who spread the rumour about Dr Mitra's bungalow having two glass coffins with two corpses had seen both bodies in their pristine state! But, we are only shown the male nude form, which is lovingly described and its boy-like appearance emphasized. Sushila/Lalita calls Dr Mitra 'father'. One wonders whether the relationship between Dr Mitra and the rejuvenated 'boy' Gobinda will have a sort of erastes-eromenos dynamic. This aspect of Roy's output has been dealt with in detail in a study of his adaptation of *Dracula*.³

Rejuvenation in Marie Corelli's *The Young Diana*⁴

It is next to impossible to find the date of first publication for many Bengali texts. Going by internal evidence, 'The Glass-Coffin' is set in post-Independence India. When Sundar-babu requests Dr Mitra to explain 'radioactivity' in Bengali, the latter warns him that, because India has not been independent for very long, there has been

little attempt to absorb science into the Bengali language, and proceeds to cite the following dictionary definition of ‘radioactive’ in Bengali:

আংশিকবিকিরণ দ্বারা বিদ্যুৎমাপক প্রভৃতির উপর ক্রিয়াকরণক্ষম
(রেডিয়াম, ইউরেনিয়াম, পলনিয়াম প্রভৃতি সম্পর্কে অপারদর্শক পদার্থ
বেদারক ও বৈদ্যুতিক ক্রিয়াজনক এবং অদৃশ্য কিরণবিকিরণক্ষম।)
(179)

It is not known whether Roy was familiar with the works of the late-nineteenth-century/early-twentieth-century popular woman novelist Marie Corelli (1855-1924). Given his interest in the supernatural, and given Corelli’s preoccupation with the occult, and that she was widely available in Indian libraries, it is possible that Roy might have read her.⁵ In 1918, Corelli published *The Young Diana*, the theme of which is the rejuvenation of Diana May, who, when the narrative begins, has ‘passed the turning point of thirty years’ (11) after which she has become, according to her own father, not only ‘superfluous’ but ‘as though she had the plague, or was recovering from small-pox.’ (42) Answering a strange advertisement, she lands up in Geneva, where Dr Féodor Dimitrius puts her through a process of rejuvenation undertaken through largely occult methods, although the Doctor calls his work scientific. At the end of the exercise, Diana regains her youthfulness, beauty and sexual attraction. However, unlike Roy’s Shushila/Lalita, who acknowledges her mentor Dr Mitra as her (surrogate) father, Diana repudiates her ‘creator’:

‘I am no more yours,’ she said, ‘than are the elements of
which your science has composed the new and youthful
vesture of my unchanging Soul! ... I have a Self ... and it is
... independent of all save its own elements.’ (318)

The novel ends with Diana feeling ‘[e]ach day ... further removed from the temporary joys and sorrows of humanity, and more enwrapt in a strange world of unknown experience to which she seems to belong. ... She feels neither love nor hate: and Féodor Dimitrius ... wanders near her watchfully, but more or less aimlessly, knowing that his beautiful ‘experiment’ has outmastered him ...’ (319). Dimitrius had told her, ‘The magnetism of sex is the thing that ‘pulls’ – but you – you, my subject, have *no* sex!’ (212; speaker’s emphasis) In the Epilogue she replies to Dimitrius’s comment that her circumstances as a woman have hardly changed because she is as alone in the world as when she answered his advertisement, with the words, ‘But only ‘so far as I am a woman.’ Now – how do you know I am a woman at all!’ (317) She is answering Dimitrius with his own earlier assertion that he has reconstructed her as an ideal which has no place in the existing biological order:

‘The love which is purely physical – the mating which has
for its object the breeding of children, is not for you any
more that it would be for an angel.’ (212)

Hers is a new Self, neither female nor male, and so, independent of the constraints imposed on both in society.

Conclusions

The earlier (1918) text of Marie Corelli is, on the face of it, more radical. Rejuvenation is carried out in the case of a woman who ends up rejecting the very social construct of ‘woman’. The later text by Roy is apparently modest in its aim of introducing novel scientific ideas in a piece of detective fiction the ostensible primary target of which is a non-adult readership. Jayanta and Manik are evidently more open-minded than Sundar-babu in their response to what Dr Mitra has done to the two old people. Sundar-babu can only think in terms of robbery and murder when confronted with something outside his range of experience. However, Roy is careful to show the firmness and mature sophistication with which the woman object of the experiment reacts to something she has both sanctioned and financed. She makes a clean break with her past, identifying herself fully with her rejuvenated – and unrecognizable to those who might have known her – self. However, from the very beginning we are told that rejuvenation is sought to be effected on *both* a woman and a man. At first, we see the rejuvenated and active woman and we see her determine her relationship with her mentor. Then, at the end, we are given a glimpse of the rejuvenated, but as-yet-dormant, man. The possibilities of *his* relationship with his mentor are endless in the light of the way the dormant male is described, as also in the light of Roy’s other works.

Notes

1. ‘কাঁচের কফিন’, *The Glass Coffin* in হেমেন্দ্রকুমার রায় রচনাবলী, *The Writings of Hemendra Kumar Roy*, Vol. 24, ed. Geeta Datta (Kolkata: Asia Publishing Co., 2009) 161-182. Roy, in the early 1920s, wrote, in serial form, the first-ever adventure story in a modern setting for children. Entitled ‘যকের ধন’, ‘The Haunted Treasure’, it was subsequently published in book form, and is a classic of Bengali children’s literature. It can be read in হেমেন্দ্রকুমার রায় রচনাবলী, *The Writings of Hemendra Kumar Roy*, Vol. 1, ed. Geeta Datta (Kolkata: Asia Publishing Co., 1974, 5th reprint 1984) 9 – 131.
2. All that Roy would have had before him concerning rejuvenation, apart from myths and the practice of alchemy, were the French surgeon Serge Abrahamovitch Voronoff’s practice of grafting monkey testicle tissue on to the testicles of men in France in the 1920s and 1930s, and the so-called Fresh cell therapy developed in 1931-1949 by Swiss doctor Paul Niehans, in which live animal embryo organs cells, generally extracted from sheep’s fetuses, are injected into the patient with the purpose of achieving a revitalizing effect. Roy, in his narrative, uses neither.
3. Prodosh Bhattacharya and Abhirup Mascharak, ‘ ‘Wilde Desire’ across Cultures: *Dracula* and its Bengali Adaptations’ in *Imperial Maladies: Literatures on Healthcare and Psychoanalysis in India*, ed. D. Bandyopadhyay and P. Kundu (New York: Nova Science Publishers © 2017) 181 – 212. Particular attention is to be paid to the discussion of

homoeroticism in Roy on 191 – 192, and the analysis of the erastes-eromenos dynamic on 196.

4. Marie Corelli, *The Young Diana* (London: Hutchinson, 1918). All references will be to this edition.
5. A letter of Corelli, professing her ‘great sympathy for India’ and her respect for oriental religious/philosophical texts, which she claims to read frequently, was translated at the end of a literary-cum-biographical notice in the Bengali periodical *Bharatbarsha*. The Bengali writer, Anil Chandra Mukhopadhyay, added the comment that this was ‘most certainly a matter of joy and pride for us.’ (Mukhopadhyay, A. C., ‘Kalpataru’ in *Bharatbarsha* (June-July 1914) 149-50). Earlier, the same entry not only mentions [*The Sorrows of Satan* and *The Life Everlasting* [sic] as novels still being perused with respect and affection by ‘our readers’ – it is not clear whether the readers of this particular periodical or Bengali readers in general are meant by this phrase. A descriptive list of occidental intellectuals published in the same periodical in December 1913-January 1914 has Bernard Shaw followed by Marie Corelli as a name known to all in contemporary literary circles.

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Emergence of a Down-to-Earth Notion of Manliness: Shudraka's Sharvilaka

Jolly Das

Records, scanty and inadequate, reveal that the playwright Sudraka was a king. *Mricchakatikam*, the only play he has written, has made his place among Sanskrit playwrights uniquely secure—by virtue of its theme and its execution. His *Mricchakatikam*, translated into English as *The Little Clay Cart*, is the solitary ancient Indian drama about urban life, reflecting intrigues and machinations of a very complex nature, and mainly involving erotic love and shrewd politics, the two volatile aspects of social existence. It is a play that deals with the delicate romantic drama revolving around Charudatta and Vasantasena, on one hand. On the other, there is the darker and dangerous side—anarchy, a coup, dethronement and the establishment of a new governance. However, unlike *Mudrarakshasha*, *Mricchakatikam* is not a political play. In *The Little Clay Cart* politics is evoked as a vibrant background, allowing the emergence of a sub-plot. The mainstay of the play is the romantic relation between Charudatta and the wealthy and influential *ganika*, Vasantasena.

In the Introduction to *The Little Clay Cart*, the English translation¹ of the play, the translator, Ryder, mentions that the play is “the only drama of invention which is full of rascals.” (xix) This quality of the text does not just make it stand apart from the rest of the contemporary plays (chiefly those by Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti)—it qualifies the play as a document of the very complex world of the city during the time of its composition, nearly sixteen hundred years ago. Neither the mythical hero, nor the king and the royal household, form the staple of the play. *The Little Clay Cart* unfolds before the reader / audience the intrigues (romantic, political, social) and rogues in very complex inter-relationships, which Biswanath Banerjee points out in the Preface to *A Myriad Prism*, “Acclaimed as the most enjoyable drama in Sanskrit, it is a remarkable composition which deviates from the beaten track, a drama which envisages a wider, fuller and deeper life.” (n.p.)

Noted scholar, Sukumari Bhattacharyya, makes pertinent observations on the formation of the play from a very close reading of the text, pointing out that the first four of the ten acts of the play draw directly from Bhasa's older play *Dasidra Charudatta*. The next six, which contain the main theatrical thrust, are Sudraka's own creation. The little clay cart being loaded with Vasantasena's gold-ornaments by her as a gift for Charudatta's little boy, Rohasena, lends its name to the play by Shudraka

whose acute dramatic sense enabled him to highlight the importance of the role of the incident for the rest of the play. The Sanskrit signifier for this toy clay-cart is ‘*mrit-shatatik*’—thus *Mrcchakatika(m)*(28-29)

Criticism on the play abounds—dealing with all sorts of aspects as well as comparative studies with other literary texts. Among the characters summoned to the inquisition of the critics, Vasantasena and Charudatta are the most frequent visitors, closely followed by Sansthanaka and Maitreya. But, the rogue-lover-political activist-Brahmin who plays a key role in the play somehow fails to draw the attention of most of the critics, for a deserving analysis of his role and character.

This play deals with the social and political life of the city of Ujjain/Avanti in all its vibrant and minute forms—the microcosm of the love-intrigue between Charudatta and Vasantasena is connected to the macrocosm of political intrigue and the roguish activities of Sansthanaka. This city is prosperous, with fortune-seekers, like the masseur and the king’s brother-in-law, arriving from distant lands. The traders here are prosperous, patronizing the artists (like the musician Rebhila) and the courtesans. With great opportunities of flamboyance, crime, too, flourishes here. The play actually moves around the gold ornaments belonging to Vasantasena. As these ornaments move from hand to hand complicating the plot of the play, their meaning changes with their interpretation by their possessor.

One such temporary possessor of Vasantasena’s jewellery is Sharvilaka, an interesting character in *Mricchakatika*, who has been somewhat overshadowed by the more glamorous romantic characters, Vasantasena and Charudatta, and others like Sansthanaka, Maitreya and even the massage-man. Yet his role in the play is the most versatile—ranging from that of a thief (who is a Brahmin!), a suitor, a political activist to an administrative portfolio-holder. He is the cornerstone of the plot of the play—linking the romantic world of Charudatta and Vasantasena to the volatile political situation in Ujjain, through his love for Madanika, Vasantasena’s maid, and for Aryaka, the tyrannical ruler’s political adversary. In an unpublished documentation of a variety of observations on the play, noted playwright, Girish Karnad remarks, “No other Indian play—not just Sanskrit—blends as successfully the dreamy mists of erotica and sensuous languor with the dark shadows of intrigue and suspense.” (n.p.)

The present paper shall attempt to trace Sudraka’s representation of this loveable rogue as a ‘manly man’—breaker of laws, lover, maker of intrigues, innovative, quick and very intelligent—with a large heart to accommodate both Madanika and Aryaka.

The range of roles played by Sharvilaka in the span of three acts out of the ten comprising the play serve in a big way to bring about this effect. This wide gamut of roles embellished with the soliloquies Shudraka endows upon him, ever so carefully, thereby making him the playwright’s spokesperson with his comments on so

many aspects of life which enable the audience / reader / researcher to have a clear perspective of issues and lifestyle in a city during the play's composition and performance. Arthur B. Keith allows him a solitary sentence in his assessment of the play, saying, "Carvilaka, once a Brahmin, now a professional thief, performs his new functions with all the precision appropriate to the performance of religious rites according to the text-books," (135) remaining silent, in his very important book on Sanskrit drama, about the significant role Sharvilaka plays in the play. Biswanath Banerjee, in the SahityaAkademi monograph on Sudraka, makes a valuable assessment of Sharvilaka (in pages 62-64), placing him "head and shoulder above" (62) the other minor characters in the play, admitting that "He plays a significant role in the over-all success of the hero in his love-affair and regaining his prestige and dignity." (62)

However, this isn't all of it. Sharvilaka "is out at night in search of money to be gathered with his expertise in the art of burglary" (62) so that he can "procure fees for the release of Madanika, his lady-love, from the bondage of Vasantasena." (62) He stands in sharp contrast to Charudatta. He is quick and innovative. Charudatta surrenders to fate and is slow. Sharvilaka steals the jewelry to purchase Madanika's freedom from being Vasantasena's slave-maid. Theft is unethical—a criminal act. Yet, Sudraka makes him steal and get away with it in the course of the play because he wishes to depict that the end and not the means is important.

There is yet another facet in his character—his political self. About this, Banerjee writes:

Sharvilaka leaves the company of his newly-married wife and risks his own life for the friend. Here is also evident his love for the country and he does not hesitate to respond to the call of time. The dramatist elevates him to lead the revolution against the despot Palaka and we learn later that he has been successful in his mission. He has killed Palaka, freed his friend Aryaka and installed him as the king of the land with the people's choice. (64)

Thus, the end justifies the means here, too. Sharvilaka serves as a documenter of contemporary life and mores. Thereby, Sudraka, who is assumed to be a monarch, uses him as a codifier of the cultural life of the times; this is interesting since the king is making an excursion into the life of a Brahmin who is no typical Brahmin, either in his perspective or in his activities, and yet very Brahmin in his commitment to Madanika and to Aryaka, son of the herdsman Gopala and thereigning king's political adversary. At the same time, it is interesting to note that this would not be possible without Shudraka's having a fair amount of knowledge regarding all that he makes Sharvilaka make observations about.

Keith's statement that Sharvilaka "was once a Brahmin" is negated by the honest sincerity of his intentions and deeds—he wishes to marry Madanika, a courtesan, and associates with the political adversary of the king. The element of dramatic versatility in his presentation/representation stems from the proficient artistic thief emerging gradually as all these identities. There is honour in the theft that justifies itself. More surprise waits for the audience—Charudatta, instead of panicking on the discovery of the theft, initially admires the artistry of the housebreaker. It takes him considerable time to arrive at an understanding of the gravity of the irresponsible loss of the casket, following which he swoons!

Karnad describes Sharvilaka as "one of the most loveable and unforgettable rogues in Sanskrit drama." (n.p.) A Brahmin by birth, he does nothing in the course of the play to prove his Brahmin descent. Rather, his first appearance is as a thief. And in keeping with the tone of the play, his very first remark, just as in the case of all the other characters, reveals his profession. As he creeps into Charudatta's compound and contemplates on the next cautious moves he shall make, he expresses his thoughts in a long monologue which may be said to be one of the finest ever written for the stage, filled with ingredients for evoking mirth in the audience. In it Sharvilaka displays his knowledge and expertise in the art of theft. But, what is most important is that the playwright, who is also a king (meaning administrator and judge of criminals including burglars), is enjoying his own art of allotting to Sharvilaka words that express his confidence, joy and mirth in his stealthy adventure, the stages of which follow in detailed description beginning with his theoretical knowledge:

But where shall I make the breach?
Where is the spot which falling drops decayed?
For each betraying sound is deadened there.
No yawning breach should in the walls be made,
So treatises on robbery declare.
Where does the palace crumble? Where the place
That niter-eaten bricks false soundness wear?
Where shall I 'scape the sight of woman's face?
Fulfillment of my wishes waits me there. (47)

This is followed by his praxis, proving his ingenuity in the art he has mastered in theory:

[*He feels the wall.*] Here is a spot weakened by constant sun and sprinkling and eaten by saltpeter rot. And here is a pile of dirt thrown up by a mouse. Now heaven be praised! My venture prospers. . . . Now how shall I make the breach?

The blessed Bearer of the Golden Lance has prescribed four varieties of breach, thus: if the bricks are baked, pull them out; if they are unbaked, cut them; if they are made of earth, wet them; if they are made of wood, split them. Here we have baked bricks; ergo, pull out the bricks.
(47)

And now, his artistic bent of mind considers the various shapes of the hole mentioned in the text-books on theft:

Now what shall be the shape I give the breach?
A “lotus,” “cistern,” “crescent moon,” or “sun”?
“Oblong,” or “cross,” or “bulging pot”? for each
The treatises permit. Which one? Which one? (47)

The only factor to guide his decision is the admiration of the discoverers of the crime next morning:

And where shall I display my sovereign skill,
That in the morning men may wonder still? (47)

Thus his decision:

In this wall of baked bricks, the “bulging pot” would be effective. I will make that. (47)

Having created the pot-shaped hole, he proceeds to apply the ‘magic’ ointment on his body that shall make him invisible to guards (if any) and slippery, perchance someone happens to grasp him. Next, comes the meticulous measurement of spaces and use of the magic stone to trace the whereabouts of gold and money in the household. However, he discovers that he has forgotten to include the measuring tape among the necessary items he has brought in a bag. To the amazement of the audience, he is not dismayed. Shudraka has intentionally made him forget the tape so that he can now make Sharvilaka innovate extempore, to use what he has with him at that vital moment—his sacred thread. Keeping in mind all the implications of this Hindu signifier, Shudraka’s blasphemy, through Sharvilaka, is noteworthy:

Aha! This sacred cord shall be my measuring line. Yes, the sacred cord is a great blessing to a Brahman, especially to one like me. For, you see,

With this he measures, ere he pierce a wall,
And picks the lock, when jewels are at stake.

It serves a key to bolted door and hall,
As tourniquet for bite of worm and snake. (48)

He is an artistic thief, proud of his ability to perform the art of theft with a finesse which leaves discoverers of his act spellbound by its beauty. Regarding the place of theft in the contemporary society about which king Shudraka is well informed as can be gauged from his wise and controlled use of the practice in his sole surviving play, Keith makes a pertinent cross-reference, saying, “The conception of the science of theft is neatly paralleled in the *Daçakumāracarita*, where a text-book of the subject is ascribed to Karnisuta.” (133-34)

Later we come to know from his soliloquy, that Sharvilaka is a compulsive thief, since he desires to buy his love’s freedom from Vasantasena whose slave she is.

Sudraka consciously employs humour to its fullest potential as a theatrical device to portray the vibrant character of Sharvilaka. Discussing this, Biswanath Banerjee shows how the three types of humour, namely, that of action, diction and physical appearances, come together in the burglary episodes focusing on Sharvilaka:

The episode of burglary in the third act gives us humour of different variety. Sharvilaka’s action in the scene and his words with dreaming Maitreya cannot but evoke laughter. It is amusing for us when the burglar speaks of the various qualities of a sacred thread and uses his own as the measuring tape for his own action in creating the hole. Maitreya’s self-praising about his intelligent action in handing over the *trust* of Vasantasena to his friend as well as his distorted sentence that ‘having made a thief the hole has run away’ make us enjoy an otherwise grave situation. (15)

The inherent humour evoked by the same episode is discussed by another scholar, T.R.S. Sharma in ‘Sudraka: Mricchakatikam’ in this fashion:

The . . . theme in the main plot is reinforced with a slight variation in the subplot of a Brahmin adventurer who is prepared to become a thief to gain the hand of his beloved, but who assists in the final revolution which puts an end to the misrule of the reigning king.

Sudraka’s humour manifests itself in many forms in this theft scene. There is the irony of situation when a thief chooses a pauper’s house for the exercise of his profession because he has been misled by the outward appearance of the mansion. The act of boring a hole in the wall becomes an

artist's handiwork. Strangely enough, the jester talking to his friend in his sleep hands over the bag of precious ornaments kept by the heroine Vasantasena for safe keeping with the hero Carudatta, into the thief's out-stretched hands. There cannot be greater irony of situation which has been fully exploited by the playwright to yield maximum dramatic effect.(22)

This play employs a wide range of Prakrits, besides Sanskrit, as the languages of communication by the different characters, as pointers towards the social status and background of the characters—which was a very important element of Sanskrit drama. Where the translator, Ryder, indicates the significance of the various prakrits in the play in the title page of the printed version, “Translated from the Original Sanskrit and prakrits into English Prose and Verse” (n.p.), the critic, Keith, makes a detailed study of the use of prakrits in *Mricchakatikam* (140-42) pointing out that the theme of this play enables the playwright to make use of one of the widest range of the prakrits employed in contemporary drama. Thus, it is clear that the effective function of the different dialects of prakrits along with Sanskrit in communicating the intricate nuances of identities and negotiations which the characters engage in are almost lost in the English translation. Sharvilaka speaks Sanskrit, following the norms of Sanskrit drama, by virtue of being a Brahmin (Keith 141). Maitreya, the Jester, speaks Pracya dialect which is an offshoot (a possible eastern dialect) of the Sauraseni Prakrit. Much of the humour in the burglary episode arises from the exchange between these two characters in the two languages spoken by each, all of which is lost in English translation of the play-text, which becomes somewhat flat in the English rendering:

Maitreya. My friend, by the wishes of cows and Brahmins I conjure you to take this golden casket.

Sharvilaka. One may not disregard the sacred wish of a cow and the wish of a Brahmin. I will take it. . . . Now I will grant the Brahmin's wish.
[*He reaches out for the casket.*]

Maitreya. How cold your fingers are, man!

Sharvilaka. What carelessness! My fingers are cold from touching water. Well, I will put my hand in my armpit. [*He warms his left hand and takes the casket.*]

Maitreya. Have you got it?

Sharvilaka. I could not refuse a Brahmin's request. I have it.

Maitreya. Now I shall sleep as peacefully as a merchant who has sold his wares.

Sharvilaka. O great Brahmin, sleep a hundred years! (50-51)

However, this intelligent burglar, having employed his knowledge in burglary to fetch the ransom required to free his beloved, plunges into the political turmoil once that has been accomplished and the need of the time beckons his services for Aryaka, immediately sending Madanika to his friend Rabhila's house, himself proceeding to participate in the political coup against the tyrannical King Pālaka. He is the key character whose activities in the romantic as well as the political worlds of the play link the two in a harmonious fusion, which is brought about in the final tenth act, with vital information being exchanged between Sharvilaka and Charudatta, this time both Brahmins speaking in Sanskrit, again impossible to gauge in the translation:

Charudatta. Who are you, sir?

Sharvilaka. I forced your house in manner base.
And stole the gems there left behind;
But though this sin oppress my mind,
I throw myself upon your grace.

Charudatta. Not so. My friend. Thereby you showed your faith in me. [*He embraces him.*]

Sharvilaka. And one thing more:
The very noble Aryaka,
To save his family and name,
Has slain the wretched Pālaka,
A victim at the altar's flame.

Charudatta. What say you?

Sharvilaka. 'Twas your cart helped him on his way,
Who sought the shelter of your name;
He slew King Pālaka to-day,
A victim at the altar's flame.

Charudatta. Sharvilaka, did you set free that Aryaka, whom Pālaka took from his hamlet, and confined without cause in the tower?

Sharvilaka. I did.

Charudatta. This is indeed most welcome tidings. (171-72)

Charudatta has been modeled on the typical hero of classical Indian drama—ideally pure, yet ineffectual in times of crisis. Sansthanaka is the typical abominable

villain. One is too good, the other very bad. Sansthanaka's activities uphold the ruined state of law and administration. He chases and abducts helpless women. But, Sharvilaka does wrong things for right intentions. He is the new man— emerging as Sudraka's superman— responding to the demands of a changing urban scenario where simplistic lines cannot be drawn between good and bad. He sets wrong things right. No means is unacceptable to him. When Sudraka, who is usually described as a king, creates this new character for his play, it is certain that he had envisioned a new sort of masculinity— vigorously vibrant with possibilities of shouldering responsibilities as a lover / husband and an administrator.

He is the manly man, unlike Charudatta or Sansthanaka, or even Palaka and Aryaka, for that matter. He is not the image of oppressive masculinity— inviting feminist attacks. He is the perfect man of action— brave, bold and charming.

One cannot resist commenting on *Utsav* (1984), the Hindustani cinematic version of *Mricchakatikam*, for the making of which Girish Karnad, the director, had undertaken deep research and preparation. Part of his research is the unpublished write-up in which he has documented his observations on the play. It shall be fitting to quote an excerpt from it:

The extraordinary quality of *Mricchakatikam* is that every shade of character, every image used, every twist in the plot has a precise purpose. Like clues in a detective story, their narrative possibilities are fully developed and brought in, with perfect timing, to shape the denouement. *Mricchakatikam* is Shakespearean not merely in its enormous range of characters, its blending of humour and pathos, its breathless pacing. It is the masterly ordering and restructuring of the material that makes the comparison inevitable.(n.p.)

The potential of the character of Sharvilaka may be recognized from Shankar Nag's (a very talented actor) playing the role of Sharvilaka in *Utsav*, making the character exceptionally lively and memorable as a practical man of the world, very different from the stereotypical ideal heroes of classical Indian drama with whom the audience cannot easily relate themselves. Karnad recognized the 'manly' nature of Sharvilaka's character, exploiting fully the scope of Sudraka's representation of this lovable rogue.

Notes

1. The selection of Sudraka's play as the text for translation into English for inclusion in the prestigious Harvard Oriental Series, points towards its merit as a creative product of its own time; thereby a definitive documentation of the richness of Indian culture, reflecting

the urban life of its contemporary times—a unique phenomenon among the range of plays produced during the era, nearly all the rest of them drawing from myths and legends and depicting the glorious enterprises of mythical heroes, kings and princes.

In his Preface dated May 23, 1905, to volume 9 of the Harvard Oriental Series, *The Little Clay Cart*, Arthur W. Ryder acknowledges the challenges he encountered as a translator, posed by “the standards of accurate scholarship set by the greatest American Sanskritists” (Preface, *The Little Clay Cart*) who nurtured the Harvard Oriental Series. The translation, made over a hundred years ago, is considered one of the best and worthy of the series to which it belongs.

Founded in 1891 by Charles Rockwell Lanman and Henry Clarke Warren, the Harvard Oriental Series continues in its endeavours to bring the rich and diverse literature of India to readers in the English language. In the ‘Note by the Editor,’ Lanman highlights the purpose of the project: “. . . the West must know the East, and the East must know the West. With that knowledge will inevitably come an interchange of potent influences that will affect profoundly the religion and morals, the philosophy, the literature, the art, in short, all the elements that make up the civilizations of the two hemispheres.” The meticulous attention accorded to the translation by the editor, Lanman, is acknowledged by Ryder in the Preface, “He has criticized this translation with the utmost rigour; indeed, the pages are few which have not witnessed some improvement from his hand. It is to him also that I owe the accuracy and beauty which characterize the printed book.” The choice of this translation for the present paper is deliberately made with this background of its emergence in perspective.

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Questioning New Womanhood in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*: A Novel

Neha Chatterjee

The status and condition of women in India have undergone multiple changes over the past few millennia. The position of women in India, both inside home and outside world, is strongly connected to family relations and social fabrics. Indian families are mostly patriarchal and male dominated. Families are usually multi-generational and hierarchical, with the elders having authority over the younger generations, and the males over females and the bride moving to in-laws place. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, as a novel is claimed to be novel depicting women emancipation and forming a collective women's space with their memory and new find identity. It narrates the story of six different women belonging different caste, status, situation et al and in their journey to Kanyakumari they seem to find their inner self and identity through their struggle and tolerance. But the primary question asked by Akhila that can a woman lives without man is never answered clearly. Instead, though these women epitomize the image of a New Women, they according to me are subservient to male fabrics only. They are apparently free and emerge to be a New Woman but in reality they are serving the patriarchal structures only through their idealization as a woman, a woman who can both stand as an individual and take the responsibility of the family. In spite of so many changes, all the changes seem to be more of a changed face of patriarchy which now appeases the rebellious side of a woman to make her more of an ideal productive being.

In 1960s with the rise of feminism, the conscious, confident and aggressive New Woman, who is completely different from her traditional docile counterpart. For acquiring a new identity, she is seen dealing with the world around on her own terms to get rid of her 'otherized' position. The New Women are aware of her destination that is to liberate herself from the clutches of unjust taboos and customs imposed on her by the male dominated society. She can fight for her own and her own rights. The fight is not so easy and short lived since it is against to the human elements like ego, greed, ambition, and selfishness. So far the women are looked at as man's privilege and they have also accepted it without rebellion. But the modern woman becomes rebellious against to the unjust nature of such an attitude and so that they have started thinks on different lines. They are very assertive in nature, practical in deeds and strong physically. They fall into the category of the New Woman who solves her problems herself. The

anti-colonial discourse on women as pointed out by Partha Chatterjee in his book, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, is divided into two spheres—material and the spiritual. The macrocosmic external domain is the material world of males dominated by the colonial power, whereas, the microcosmic spiritual inner world specified as women space was supposed to be unaffected by the profane worldly affairs. Social roles are bifurcated according to gender which is emblematic of “Ghar” and “Bahir”; home and the world. The home was the central site for expressing the spiritual and national culture and ‘new women’ subjected to new patriarchy were educated to perpetually protect and nurture the home.

Geetanjali Gangoli in her *Indian Feminisms Law, Patriarchies and Violence in India* is of the opinion that Feminist thoughts and movements in India have often posed challenges to the established patriarchal institutions like family, society, moral and cultural edifices. Gangoli says:

Nationally, the emergence of feminism in the 1970s has been attributed to an expansion of educational and employment opportunities for women, disillusionment with existing political structures owing to the perceived excesses of the Emergency, and a feeling of disillusionment with mainstream left-wing parties, which seemed to accord a low priority to what were called ‘women’s issues.’ (15)

Feminists have intervened in the area of patriarchal institutions to expose the working of controls of patriarchy over structures both within law and outside law, such as, critiquing civil marriage and divorce laws that extend more rights to men than women. As a movement it continuously challenges the hegemonic notions of the ‘Indian family’, though detractors have constructed Indian feminism as a distinctly western phenomenon. In the early nineteenth century, the notion of ‘woman question’ was raised primarily by the elite upper caste Hindu men. The ‘woman question’ included issues such as women’s education, widow remarriage and campaigns against Sati, et al. The upper caste Hindu women rejected the constraints that were within hindu and especially Brahminical traditions. Social reform that emphasized on improving women’s status was somewhat weakened in the late nineteenth century, due to emerging nationalist movements in India that resisted ‘colonial interventions in gender relations’ in the areas of family relations. Campaigns against Sati and widow remarriage supported by social reformist were seen as internal matters to be decided and discussed within the community.

Judith Butler, following the idea of Beauvoir, has ruptured the sex/gender distinction and argued that there is hardly any sex which is not already gender. Human born are gendered from the beginning of their social existence and simultaneously there is

barely any existence that is not social. There is no “natural body” that pre-exists its cultural inscription and gender is not something one is, it is something one does, act, or perform. Butler elaborates the ideas in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. (33)

Gender is not just a process, but it is a particular type of process, “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” as Butler puts it. The idea of performativity is introduced in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* when Butler states that:

... gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. (25)

Identity of an individual is constituted on the basis of performance.

Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, in book, *New Woman Hybridities Femininity, feminism and International Consumer Culture*, pointed out that New Women, are always thought to be a happy mingling and hybrid of traditional thoughts of femininity and the modern living together, which is complex and fragile identity and difficult to maintain. Hybridity of one’s identity is one of the most important and versatile concepts that has emerged from post-colonial and cultural studies, yet what we may infer from its coupling with the New Woman may not, at first. They asks the question, what is a hybrid New Woman? What, for that matter, is a non-hybrid New Woman? Of course, this second question is inseparable from the first, one of the implications of discussing cultural or other hybridities is to invoke and perhaps reinforce the idea of an essentialized cultural authenticity. The hybrid New Women inevitably bolsters the stereotype of the New Woman.

Chris Beasley’s book, *Gender & Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers* differentiates feminism into two subfields (along with Masculinity Studies) which can be situated under the umbrella term ‘gender’. ‘Gender’ typically refers to the social process of dividing up people and social practices along the lines of sexual and social identities as appropriated by culture. The gendering process frequently involves forming hierarchies in the divisions it enacts. One or more categories of sexual identity are privileged or devalued. Beasley says,

Gender has been used to indicate that nature (bodies) do not necessarily tell you much about human social organisation

of sexed identities and practices. In short, a male body does not necessarily result in social masculinity, in a personal identity deemed 'masculine'. Gender in this setting was seen as a reference to 'social construction'. (13)

Gender in the modern West and in the whole world usually refers to two distinct and separate categories of human beings into men and women as well as to the division of social practices into two fields. The gendering of social practices may be found in contemporary society, in a strong association between men and public life and between women and domestic life, even though men and women occupy both spaces but are not equal.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* is a poignant and nostalgic tale of a middle aged unmarried Tamil Brahmin woman, Akhilandeswari alias Akhila, on her journey of self-discovery as an individual by breaking the shackles of the conservative family and orthodox Tamil Brahmin society. Akhila living in her family never had a chance to live a life on her own conditions. All she did was to live and fulfilling the multiple roles of a daughter, a sister, an aunt, and most of all be a provider for the family. Akhila continued to live this life until the turning point had not come. A one-way rail ticket to Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu has changed the entire course of her life, her understanding of relationships, and eventually transforms her into a completely different woman. The main dilemma of the novel is the moment when during her journey in the all ladies coupé Akhila asks her women co-passengers the question that had been haunting her all her life. Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does she need a man to feel complete?

Marriage is a social and cultural institution where women are expected to be the all responsible to follow the conventions to make it a successful endeavor. Families are mostly dominated by men and organized by women, who find herself in social and cultural insecurities. Women stepping out of their confinements, fighting to stand as an important noticeable individual in social fabric tend to break the so called image of a women being the angel or goddesses of the house. Margaret Shanti, one of the travelers in the ladies coupe, narrates her story of weaving strategies to get her dreams true. Margaret's husband, Ebenezer Paulraj, represents the perfect epitome of a male chauvinist who believes in dominating. He exercises Margaret into a position of subservient silence, making her out to be an unnoticed and ordinary girl, who has once a bright academic career and a warm personality but now reduced to an average wife. His subtle cruelty to the children in his school gets repeated with his wife too. He is infatuated with the girlish characteristics of Margaret from the very first meet and to preserve the girlish charm in her, when she happily announced her pregnancy, he insisted on to abort the baby without considering her agony and distress. She has

consistently gone through physical, emotional and spiritual crisis throughout her marital life. The dream of ideal marriage, the love Ebenezer Paulraj for Margaret Shanti from the bottom of his heart, were not enough to make Ebe accept her individual likes and dislikes, whims and fancies, and dreams and aims. Margaret is portrayed as a little girl nods 'yes' to whatever her husband says and ready to do anything for him but her mind got disrupted with this role when she was forced to abort and hamper her motherhood.

Further, she was even forced to take up B.Ed., instead of Ph.D., made to work only for her husband. She starts to hate him and the day she realizes her hatred towards him, she feels liberated from some unknown command:

I mouthed the words: I HATE HIM. I HATE MY HUSBAND. I HATE EBENEZAR PAULRAJ. I HATE HIM. HATE HIM. I waited for a clap of roar, a hurling meteor, a hurricane, a dust tempest for some super phenomenon that is usually meant to accompany such momentous and perhaps sacrilegious revelations. (Nair 98)

Margaret in her isolation finds consolation in eating a lot of food and puts on weight. Ebe, on the other hand, who is aware of his health and fitness, makes her feel guilty about her weight gain. She leads a routine life until the day James, the golden fish, and floats dead. The moment proves to be a turning point in her life. She does not want her life to float like dead fish. Ebenezer's love for food and sex becomes a tool for Margaret and pampers Ebenezer with sex and food he likes the most in his life. As a result he becomes fat, loses his egotism and needs her more and more. She, once controlled by him earlier, now holds him completely in her hands. It seems to be a unique way adapted by Margaret to go back into the society, changes her parents' outlook and attitude of her husband. The heavy despair of Margaret, her silenced voice, her physical and mental sufferings, and the attempt she takes to make her tough are the places which transforms her into a New Woman.

Indian custom expects wife to be a superior, obedient, realistic, subservient and righteous. Janaki is likely to take up this customary role of women being a daughter, a wife and a mother but not an individual who claims her life to be her own with an everlasting secondary position.

Janaki married to Prabhakar at the tender age of eighteen and leads a happy, contented, long married life for forty years. Janaki's husband is a caring partner but she feels the rope of revolt when she finds her husband controlling everybody even their grown up son. Prabhakar's authoritarian superiority, accuracy, and correctness start irritating Janaki and disturbing her apparently smooth life. She discovers herself and her true happiness that lies in her, but she is not able to take off the web under

which she is covered for a long period. Her response to Akhila's query is, "Why should a woman live by herself? There is always a man willing to be with her" (Nair 21), then she explains that:

I am a woman who has always been looked after. First there was my father and brothers; then my husband, when my husband is gone there will be my son, waiting to take off from where his father left off. Woman like me ends up being fragile. (Nair 22)

She follows the lines constructed by patriarchy and fails to come out of it though she wants to.

Sheela, the next narrator in *Ladies Coupe*, is a teenager of fourteen, blessed with a deep insight. She observes the family around her and the relationship between her grandmother, mother and father and she thereby understands the dynamics and practicality of life. She is attached to her grandmother until she dies and the attachment brings in a sense of maturity in Sheela as evident from her conversation with other fellow travelers. The knowledge and inter-generational ambivalence of three generation women can be found in Sheela; her mother's and her grandmother's and also her own. She knows that:

Women turn to their mother when they have no one else to turn to. Women know that a mother alone will find it possible to unearth some shred of compassion and love that in everyone else has become ashes. (Nair 71)

Sheela's grandmother also teaches her the harmful portrait of men who lead women bodily as well as sensitively. Sheela is ceaselessly scolded by her father for using 'shit' in every sentence, for speaking to boys and for being impolite. He has encouraged her to speak "with a razor-edged wit and a finely developed skill of repartee" (Nair 70). Sheela's father always gives preference to her as his child. However, when she starts to talk like a grown woman, he is completely changed and starts to control her whenever she begins to talk. When her grandmother dies of cancer and her body is prepared for funeral, Sheela dresses her grandmother in a good costume with her jewels. She does it because she remembers the words of her grandmother, "The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror, your reflection should make you feel happy" (Nair 67). Thus, Sheela fulfills the wish of her grandmother by tender her dead body with jewels.

Through the character of Prabha Devi, Anita Nair hints at the gender bias which begins from the cradle. The news of the birth of Prabha is denounced by her father in the following words: "Has this baby, apart from ruining my business plans addled your

brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance” (Nair 169). As a child she is confident to play games suitable for a girl and as she grows up is groomed to be the perfect wife and home-maker. However, as she grows up finds life very tedious and refuses to define life in a mechanical way as noted by patriarchy. Acknowledging her own weakness and nervousness, she decides to flow along with the tide rather than being thrown away on the banks. Every Indian parent is more attached to the male child compared to the female child. The character of Prabha Devi represents the problematics of the distinction made between children of different gender. Although Prabha Devi’s father is unhappy at her birth, her mother appears rather happy. Her daughter is a person who would continue living the language, opinion and conduct of the mother, even after she is gone. She is happy that there is someone to wear her jewellery and take her recipes or heritage to the other house. Prabha’s mother loved her and favored her company to that of all her four sons. In spite of all this distress and love for the daughter, she also realizes that a woman is not supposed to voice her concern or opinion. “She had discovered that a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell, to be shunned” (Nair 170).

In the second phase of her life, that is her marriage with Jagdeesh, who owns a jewellery shop, she acts as a conventional wife according to her mother’s training. Prabha Devi is an proficient woman “whose embroidery was done with stitches so fine that you could barely see them,” whose “ideas were light and soft,” and who “walked with small mincing steps, her head forever bowed, suppliant, womanly” (Nair 170). But for a brief period, she turns into an arrogant and teasing woman, but reverts back to her family with a difference in attitude. Using a swim suit and indulging in swimming gives her a sense of freedom and identity as wife and mother. Prabha Devi is presented as a woman with her share of virtue and vices, but Anita Nair has tried to show great respect towards this individuality.

Anita Nair dexterously utilizes the story of Marikolunthu to remark upon the sexual abuse of Indian women living in rural background. Marikolunthu’s story concludes one of the darkest truths about patriarchy that most men take benefit of women’s isolation, illiteracy, reliance, unawareness and annoyance. They never pause to guilt the woman at the end. The society dominated by patriarchal culture tends to lay down the rule that a woman’s liability towards the family is total whereas any sort of other authority is conveniently denied to her. Marikolunthu undergoes disgrace and embarrassment, which result in negating her son Muthu. Marikolunthu’s character reveals the physical as well as mental suffering due to lack of knowledge and poverty. Her mother works as a cook at Chettiar’s house, which is one of the richest families in their village and she used to look after her house leaving education. She even works at the Chettiar’s house when her mother is ill, and assigned with the work of taking care of a child of Sujata Akka, the daughter-in-law of Chettiar. She showers love and

care upon the child. She takes care of him well, but hates her son Muthu, the one who run off many attempts of abortion. He is the result of her seduction by Murugesan. Marikoulunthu, destitute from the society, and Sujata Akka, deprived from her husband, find mutual contentment in their closeness. Later Sujata's husband also uses Marikolunthu to fulfill his sexual desires. When Sujata Akka comes to know this, instead of punishing her husband, she pushes Marikolunthu out of her household. She gets the responsibility of her own child after her mother's death but heartlessly she mortgages him at one of Murugesan's looms for five thousand rupees. The anger she has on Murugesan, the society which saves him from punishment, her incapability and the hatred of her son, everything comes to an end only at the death of Murugasen. The turning point in her life comes when she sees the dead body of Murugesan burning at the pyre and she sees Muthu tends to the pyre. She is shocked at the recognition that she has abridged her son to a very lower state for no fault of his. All the hatred she has on him goes with the flames. She feels love for her child. She decides to look after him and makes up her mind to call him back to her. Finally Marikolanthu, an unspoken victim, forced motherhood and lesbianism, finds peace only after accepting her responsibility of the child, whom she has worthless and neglected. Marikolanthu's constant search for meanings and values of life ends here.

Further, this interaction with other women gives Akhila an individuation from personal to historical. She realizes that other women have also experienced similar things. These women add to her sense of being as an individual and also as an Indian woman. The concept of 'Indianness' helps Akhila understand how she shares communal pressures with these women and also how she can make a place for herself in the existing hostile community. This can both be a source of strength as well as discouragement. But in Akhila's case this literal and metaphorical journey serves as an educating experience which strengthens her by broadening her horizon. Akhila decides to go on this journey because she realizes that she has reached her saturation point where her life has been taken out of her control. She wants to run away from her family and responsibilities therefore, she plans to go on a journey that ultimately makes her a different woman.

Being a modern woman Akhila feels sickened with her mother's conventional preaching. Even then she supports her family and sacrifices all her happiness and her own personal life, right from educating her brothers and marrying off her sisters. They all get settled in their lives, but turn a blind eye towards her desires. Not even her mother thinks about the welfare of her daughter and remains so unconscious to the fact that she has made sacrifices so that her family prospers. The noble deed of prosperity done by her for her family adds to misfortune in her life. Her mother never bothers for her to get married and have family. She feels caged and rapt because of their indifferent attitude and disdain for her. This makes her a rebellion. She likes

everything which is against narrow-minded Brahmin culture. She falls in love with a boy named Hari, who is much younger to her and even started eating eggs. They even share an intense physical relationship as well, which confirms Akhila's rebellion against the forced customs on her. She tries to revive the pleasure of being a woman with him. But owing to the fear of communal pressure she decides to end her relationship with him.

She now possesses the seeds which can inspire others to search their souls, their inner self's and look for answers which lie within them. She feels suffocated and befriends Katherine, a Christian by religion who is considered as immoral by Brahmin community just because of their life-style whereas Akhila gets inspired only by her different and unconventional life-style. Akhila tries to fight all the prejudices whether gender related or caste related. Karpagam, a childhood friend of Akhila, is another modern and unconventional woman. She lives according to her wishes and instincts. Although she is a widow, defies all norms to be followed by the widows and adorns herself with coloured clothes and jewellery. She criticizes all the ancient laws which snatch the freedom to live one's own life after husband's death and explodes. All her life she has been continuously haunted by the question "Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete? When she decides to leave her family and live alone, her siblings do not approve that. They doubt why she is talking about her needs. She gets irritate and wants to be nobody's daughter; Nobody's sister; Nobody's wife; Nobody's mother. In an impulsive moment she buys a one-way ticket for herself to Kanyakumari and in the compartment silently listens to the stories of other women, which finally make Akhila to take the ultimate decision of her life, something only for herself. For Akhila the quest for an answer to this troublesome question becomes the quest for her identity. The novel can be viewed in terms of collective women's psyche. This psyche is a product of female culture rooted in different classes, nationalities and races.

Now she wanted everything for herself whether it is gratification of her physical desires or having family and children. She even establishes a sexual relationship with a stranger in a hotel room in Kanyakumari. She doesn't even bother to ask this stranger's name. She is now a transformed and intermediary being. Like the characters presented in the novel, in real life also women wants to create a new world- a world of their own. The quest for identity is carried out during the train journey; Akhila listens to the other women, but also rethinks of her past. Different figures of women emerge from Akhila's past: her mother, her neighbour Sarasa Mami, her Anglo- Indian friend Katherine and her widowed friend Karpagam. Akhila's mother is a very traditional and conservative Brahmin woman following strictly the prescriptions of her own caste. She embodies the ideal Hindu good wife, the pativarta, and she does not revolt to the role forced on her by the society and custom. On the contrary, she blindly accepts her

role and also inculcates her daughters with these principles. When her father passed away, her mother becomes a widow and she undergoes the ritual of widowhood. Her mother is deprived of the symbols of marriage, which is defined as symbols of gender discrimination. And being the eldest child of the parents, Akhila shoulders the responsibilities.

Getting a job in the income tax department on compassionate grounds, she not only becomes the “man” of the family but also loses her individual choices and desires. Akhila was forced to delete the essence of womanhood from herself to become a “Spinster, government employee, historian and eater of eggs” (Nair 90). She forgets her womanhood and she is drawn into a coil of duties in guiding her brothers in their studies and career and also arranges their marriages. But Akhila becomes rigid and solemn. The house is in order but the members have forgotten about Akhila’s emotion and her emotional needs. Not called by her name, she gets the treatment of Akka, elder or older sister, the customary respectful address set aside to women either inside or outside the family group. Even her mother used to call her Ammadi. What Akhila missed the most was that no one ever called her by her name any more, her original identity representing her desires. This reminds the readers about the Indian female condition where she is expected to spend her time to perform the role of the daughter, sister and main source of income of the family to satisfy their requirements. The readers are handled to the feeling when Akhila gets out of control and ask over her, “So who was Akhilandeswari? Did she exist at all? If she did, what was her identity? Did her heart skip a beat when she saw a mango tree studded with blossoms?” (Nair 84). She fights the world of injustices related to gender, class, caste and religion around her.

In the novel *Ladies Coupe* caste, class, gender and religion become borders, walls and enclosures which separate human beings. At the end of the novel every person possesses some fine qualities and inner vigor which even they are unaware of. It is only in the face of certain untoward incident or conditions into which they are thrown that these traits begin to surface. Further these qualities receive a finer border and luster only when faced with predicaments. Six women find themselves together in a ladies coupe, traveling, each for her purpose. This ladies coupe becomes a comfort zone where each one begins voicing their tale and in the process is both reassured and persuaded of greater things. They have been repressed, oppressed and humiliated by the society, their own families and their male counterparts. All the women in this work belong to different age groups, varied cultural and economic backgrounds representing different facets of life. But the question is have they really left the shackles of patriarchy? If we consider the lives of each of every women, who seems to be “New Woman” either takes recourse to different assigned roles by patriarchy or returns to the space of patriarchal domination and emerge as an ideal women with both identity

and obedience.

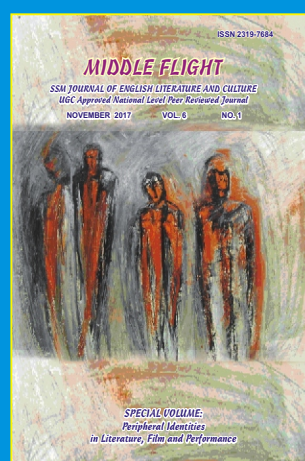
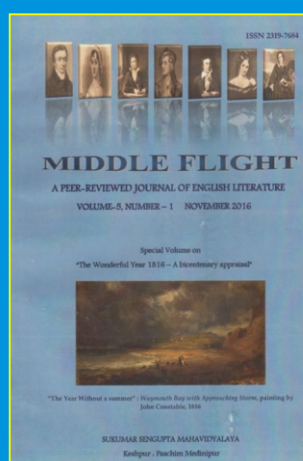
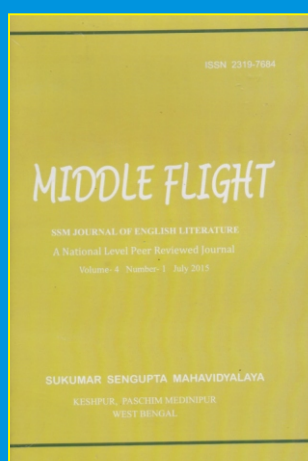
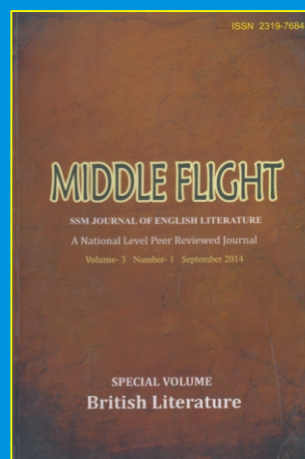
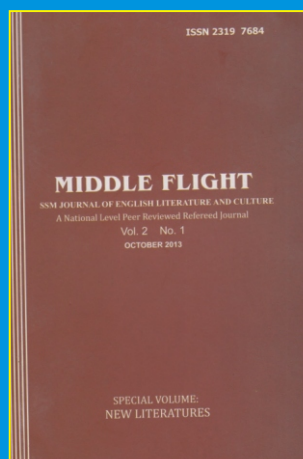
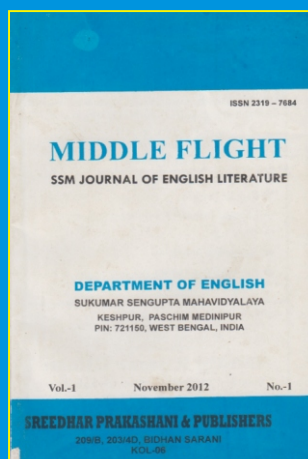
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